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ABSTRACT

Project Educational Quality in Adult Literacy (EQuAL) was initiated to improve the quality of adult basic and literacy education (ABLE) services provided to adult learners in Pennsylvania. Project EQuAL's objectives were as follows: (1) set performance standards to facilitate delivery of quality ABLE programs to adult learners; (2) institute a system of continuous program improvement for adult education service providers; and (3) develop a coordinated infrastructure of policy, program development, training, and technical assistance to support delivery of high-quality ABLE. The following phases of Project EQuAL were implemented in 1994-1998: (1) alignment of Pennsylvania's process for monitoring ABLE programs with indicators of program quality; (2) training of staff from 10 Pilot 1 sites to form EQuAL improvement teams and conduct a problem-solving process to improve programs; (3) training of staff at 10 Pilot 2 sites and development of policies to support Project EQuAL's assessment and program activities; (4) enhancement of the pilot sites and implementation of policies and planning; and (5) training of staff at 64 Wave 1 sites. By the end of phase 5, a number of objectives related to state policy formation, training and technical assistance, and quality improvement had been achieved. Descriptions of the Project EQuAL cohorts are appended. (Contains 19 exhibits.) (MN)

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Abt Associates Inc.

55 Wheeler Street
Cambridge, Massachusetts
02138-1168

617 492-7100 *telephone*
617 492-5219 *facsimile*

Hampden Square, Suite 600
4800 Montgomery Lane
Bethesda, Maryland
20814-5341

301 913-0500 *telephone*
301 652-3618 *facsimile*

640 North LaSalle Street
Suite 400
Chicago, Illinois
60610-3781

312 867-4000 *telephone*
312 867-4200 *facsimile*

Improving Programs Through Policy and Professional Development: Lessons Learned from Project Educational Quality in Adult Literacy (EQuAL)

1999

Prepared by:
Judith A. Alamprese
Eric M. Stickney

Submitted to:
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PREFACE

The Pennsylvania Department of Education's Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) embarked on a multi-year initiative in 1994 to improve the quality of basic education services provided to adults in the state. This initiative, Project Educational Quality in Adult Literacy (EQuAL), was designed as a systemic intervention to institutionalize the process of continuous program improvement in adult basic and literacy programs. ABLE's guiding assumption was that programs' provision of quality services to adult learners would result in learners' attainment of positive outcomes. Under Project EQuAL, ABLE has developed a coordinated set of policies as well as training and technical assistance to support local programs' activities in adopting a problem-solving process to program improvement.

As part of Project EQuAL, ABLE commissioned COSMOS Corporation and subsequently Abt Associates Inc. to assist in the development and assessment of the initiative. This report, prepared by Abt Associates, describes Project EQuAL's activities during 1994-1998, the results from these activities, and recommendations for ABLE to consider in moving forward with Project EQuAL.

Abt Associates Inc.'s staff conducted a number of activities to document the progress of Project EQuAL, including meetings with ABLE staff, telephone interviews and site visits to programs participating in Project EQuAL, and surveys to Project EQuAL coordinators and technical assistance providers. The authors of this report extend their thanks to everyone who provided information as part of Abt Associates' data collection process. The authors are particularly grateful to Cheryl Keenan, ABLE's director, without whose vision and support Project EQuAL would not have been possible.

While we are thankful for the assistance provided by others, the authors alone are responsible for the contents of this report.

Judith A. Alamprese
Eric M. Stickney

Abt Associates Inc.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Since Summer 1994, the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) has led a statewide initiative to improve the quality of basic education and literacy services provided to adult learners in the state. Prompted in part by the federal and state call for accountability, but also by ABLE's desire to lead a large and diverse system of service providers in offering high quality educational services to adults, Project Educational Quality in Adult Literacy (EQuAL) has changed the ways in which training, technical assistance, and local program operations in adult education are carried out in Pennsylvania. The Project EQuAL initiative has involved the creation of policies to support new accountability requirements and programmatic changes, as well as the development and implementation of training and technical assistance to facilitate the use of new program procedures. As part of the development of Project EQuAL, ABLE commissioned COSMOS Corporation and subsequently Abt Associates Inc. to assist in creating, implementing, and documenting the activities undertaken as part of Project EQuAL. This report, prepared by Abt Associates, describes Project EQuAL's activities during 1994-1998, the results from these activities, and recommendations for ABLE to consider in moving forward with Project EQuAL.

Project EQuAL's Objectives and Assumptions

Project EQuAL was designed to meet the following objectives:

- To set performance standards that would facilitate adult education service providers' delivery of quality programs to adult learners;
- To institute a system of continuous program improvement for adult education service providers; and
- To develop a coordinated infrastructure of policy, program development, training, and technical assistance to support the delivery of high quality adult education services.

The Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education's director and staff made a number of assumptions in designing an initiative to meet these objectives. The first assumption was that change is both a "top-down" and bottom-up" process that is interactive and reinforcing. While it was essential that ABLE lead the initiative, set policies guiding the use of a performance management system, and deploy resources that could support the system, the staff from local adult education service providers also had a critical role in developing materials and processes

for continuous program improvement and in determining the ways in which change could best be facilitated in their programs.

A second assumption was that an infrastructure had to be developed that would enable programs to improve the quality of their services, which in turn would result in improved learner outcomes such as learning gains, program participation rates, and learners' satisfaction with the services being provided. This infrastructure would need to involve policy, program development, and training and technical assistance.

A final assumption that ABLE made, based on the experience of other state adult education programs that had carried out program improvement initiatives, was that change takes time and the long-term effects of program improvement--enhanced learner outcomes--would not be realized in the near term. A number of practices would need to be in place in programs before there would be documented evidence that learners from Project EQuAL programs performed better than those from programs not involved in program improvement. These practices were accurate learner assessment, data reporting, data analysis, and quality instruction.

Approach to Program Improvement

ABLE's approach to a statewide program improvement process was to design an initiative that was multi-year, iterative in its development, and involved a variety of stakeholders. Because of the number and diversity of adult education service provides in the state, any process involving development, training, and technical assistance would have to be undertaken in stages. Thus Project EQuAL was designed to be a staged implementation process with a series of pilot activities, whereby increasing numbers of service providers participated in training and technical assistance related to program improvement.

As part of ABLE's desire to build upon other states' experiences in creating an initiative, it procured the services of Judith Alamprese--originally from COSMOS Corporation and then from Abt Associates Inc.--to assist with the development of Project EQuAL. Ms. Alamprese had worked with California, Connecticut, and Oregon in assessing the effects of their statewide improvement initiatives and wanted to use the lessons from these states in Project EQuAL. ABLE's staff and Ms. Alamprese thus designed Project EQuAL as an initiative that involved assessing the current state of practice of service providers, developing and pilot testing program improvement interventions, refining the interventions, and assisting the state's adult education staff development cadre in transferring the development and refinement processes. In this way, ABLE worked with an external consultant in developing an overall initial plan, and involved key stakeholders in crafting the key elements of the plan as well as in designing the materials and training support to implement the plan.

Another component of Project EQuAL was the monitoring of related federal and state policies and requirements as Project EQuAL evolved in order to ensure that EQuAL's activities reflected emerging issues in the state's human services delivery system. Through the involvement of interagency members on Project EQuAL's Advisory Committee and the state director of adult education's participation in interagency committees and task forces, policies and technical assistance to support Project EQuAL were developed in light of emerging state priorities.

ABLE's approach to developing the program improvement initiative involved the following five stages of activities:

- **Planning and Policy Development--Phase I**: Consistent with the principle of having an ongoing monitoring system, EQuAL's first set of activities was to revise the state's process for monitoring basic skills and literacy programs to align it with the indicators of program quality. The procedures for setting performance standards for adult education programs also were developed, as was the conceptualization for the process of beginning a continuous improvement process with a set of pilot programs;

- **EQuAL Pilot 1/Performance Standards Data Collection**: During the first year, staff from 10 Pilot 1 sites were trained to form EQuAL improvement teams and conduct a problem-solving process to analyze data and improve their programs. Initial assessment data also were collected for determining the state's performance standards, and ABLE announced the inception of the EQuAL initiative;

- **Expansion of EQuAL Pilot/Policy Development--Phase 2**: During EQuAL's second year, 10 Pilot 2 sites were trained and there was further collection of assessment data for setting draft performance standards. ABLE began the development of policies for coordinating its National Literacy Act of 1991, Section 353 funding for special projects to support the assessment and program improvement activities underway with Project EQuAL;

- **Enhancement of Pilot Sites/Implementation of Policies and Planning--Phase 2**: During the third year, ABLE began its plan for expanding programs' participation in EQuAL beyond the pilot sites. A process for identifying the next "wave" of EQuAL sites was determined and training and materials for supporting EQuAL's expansion were created. Additional special projects were funded to develop materials for facilitating program improvement and for reorganizing the state's professional development system; and

- **"Going to Scale" with EQuAL/Implementation of Policies**: During EQuAL's fourth year, 64 Wave 1 sites were trained. Basic education and literacy service providers were required to address the state's performance standards for adult education, and the reorganized professional development system provided training and technical assistance to the Wave 1 sites.

Using the key elements of this approach as a guiding framework, ABLE's staff, external consultant, staff development cadre, and local service providers undertook a number of activities to build an infrastructure and environment for continuous program improvement in adult education.

Project EQuAL Activities

ABLE facilitated a number of activities related to the development of policy and program processes and materials as well as the delivery of training and technical assistance in carrying out Project EQuAL's multi-stage initiative. These activities were of the following types:

- Intervention processes and policies that ABLE developed to guide service providers in continuous program improvement;
- Products that service providers could use in operating their programs;
- Training and technical assistance to facilitate change in service provider operations; and
- Monitoring and evaluation activities to track the progress of EQuAL and identify needed processes and products.

Intervention Processes and Policies. The activities related to the development of processes and policies to support the EQuAL intervention were:

- The revision of the state's system for monitoring basic education and literacy programs;
- The development of a design for EQuAL that included two phases of pilot sites from which lessons learned would guide the expansion of the number and types of programs participating in the initiative;
- The setting of draft performance standards for adult basic and literacy education based on a sample of learners from the EQuAL Pilot programs;
- The development of the Project EQuAL intervention, which was a problem-solving process that staff from basic education and literacy programs could use in identifying problems or questions about their programs, collecting and analyzing data about these problems, drawing conclusions about the possible causes of the problem, and identifying and implementing solutions. Local program staff were trained to work in teams using this process and to report their findings on a Data for Decision-Making Log, which was reviewed and analyzed. Feedback on the logs then was provided to the local teams to facilitate their continuous program improvement activities;

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- The formation of an EQuAL Advisory Committee, which was comprised of key stakeholders from the basic skills and literacy service provider system as well as from vocational education, labor, and human services;

- The creation of a self-assessment process for EQuAL sites to use in reviewing the strengths and weaknesses of their programs;

- The coordination of projects funded under National Adult Literacy Act of 1991, Section 353 funds to support the implementation of Project EQuAl;

- The reduction of the number of the state's professional development centers (PDCs) to six, in order to streamline the delivery of professional development services; and

- The revision of the process for adult basic education and literacy programs to apply for funding for adult education services.

Products. ABLE supported the development of a number of products to assist programs in meeting the performance standards and engaging in program improvement. These included: 1) an assessment manual; 2) a self-assessment checklist; 3) Data-for-Decision-Making Log; and 4) an Adult Learner Skills Competencies manual.

Training and Technical Assistance. The state's training and technical assistance system evolved over the first four years of EQuAL from a system that addressed a wide variety of topics and staff needs to a more focused delivery system of services. Over this period, the development of assistance activities shifted from the external consultant to the state's cadre of staff development providers.

Monitoring and Evaluation Activities. Throughout Project EQuAL, the external consultant collected data to monitor the implementation of the Pilot sites and to determine needs for technical assistance. During the fourth year of EQuAL, when the external consultant no longer provided training and technical assistance, she collected data on the implementation of Wave 1 sites. These data were used to obtain feedback from sites about the processes developed as part of EQuAL and to provide information about the sequence of the change process.

Outcomes from Project EQuAL

By the end of the fourth year of Project EQuAL, a number of outcomes had been realized in terms of the development of state policy, the provision of training and technical assistance, and the quality of services being provided to adult learners.

Policy. ABLE set draft standards regarding the performance of adult basic education and literacy programs, and during program year 1997-98 local programs had to report data regarding the

extent to which they had met the draft standards. ABLE's use of Section 353 monies evolved over time and, by the end of 1997-1998, funding priorities had been targeted and coordinated so that activities undertaken with Section 353 monies resulted in products and technical assistance that built upon and reinforced one another. These activities were coordinated so that they supported the program improvement processes being facilitated through Project EQuAL. The state's monitoring process for adult education and literacy programs also was aligned with program quality indicators and the state staff were more effective in reviewing programs and providing recommendations to service providers concerning their program improvement activities. In addition, the goal of continuous program improvement was an underlying theme in all of ABLE's activities supporting local service providers.

Training and Technical Assistance. Through Project EQuAL, a training and technical assistance infrastructure was built that emphasizes continuous program improvement, facilitates service providers' access to staff development directly related to program improvement, and promotes problem-solving and the collection and analysis of data in managing programs. The technical assistance system also utilizes peer assistance in transferring practices and in supporting local service provider staff in assessing the quality of their programs as they perform activities to improve their services.

Quality of Programs. As a result of Project EQuAL, service provider staff have begun to work in teams to analyze their program operations and to change the ways in which they provide services to learners. Key areas of program changes have been in recruitment and retention activities; the collection of assessment data; the organization of record-keeping systems to facilitate the use of data; and the delivery of instruction. As a result of these improvements, Project EQuAL participants have reported that the morale in their programs has improved, they have better methods for determining the solutions to problems, and they are learning to use learner assessment and other data to address the needs of their learners more effectively.

Recommendations for Future Directions

As ABLE moves forward in implementing Project EQuAL, the following activities are recommended to strengthen and enhance the system that has been developed:

Program Performance Standards

- Conduct a validation study of the learner outcome standards through the analysis of assessment data from a sample of learners, using the Literacy Pro system to determine the level of gain across subpopulations of learners from a variety of service providers. This study will provide information that can be used to determine appropriate standards for each subpopulation of learners for whom data are reported;

- Continue to provide training in the administration of assessment instruments to incumbent and new staff. It is critical that reliable and valid data be collected by local programs, and the percentage of pre-post valid scores is the key indicator that there are quality data. Staff need to be reinforced in the appropriate use of instruments and in strategies for ensuring the collection of pre-post data for each learner;

- Conduct a survey of programs to determine the extent to which programs are referring learners to further education or training and/or unsubsidized jobs, and the processes they have for documenting these outcomes. This survey would provide baseline information for determining the range of service providers who are engaged in these types of activities as well as their capacity for collecting the required outcome data; and

- Conduct further training on the use of the management information system for accessing data for managing programs, particularly in the area of instruction. Staff need assistance in interpreting the data that can be retrieved using Literacy Pro, and on how to use these data at the class level for organizing instruction and for providing feedback and guidance to learners.

Continuous Program Improvement

- Refine the training in the problem-solving process to provide staff with skills in problem identification/question asking, data analysis and interpretation, and solution specification. Staff need assistance in determining how to specify a question about a program issue, methods for collecting new or examining existing information, and strategies for analyzing and interpreting data using basic data reduction techniques. Staff also need suggestions on how to develop feasible solutions to the problems that they have posed;

- Gather information about the types of changes that programs have made in the key areas of program improvement and disseminate lessons learned about the change process. Through EQuAL, program staff have worked on a number of similar issues and made program changes based on their review and analysis of program information. It would be helpful for program staff to learn about the variety of changes that programs have made in the core areas of program operations that have been the focus of EQuAL's problem-solving process.

- Develop a strategy for assisting programs in improving curriculum and instruction--a key area programs identified as requiring change. As the federally funded research studies on ABE and ESL curriculum disseminate the results of their work, this information could be used to guide local programs in examining the quality of their instruction and curricular materials; and

- Consider strategies for fostering the participation of program administrators in the improvement process and for addressing the need for time, staff, and fiscal resources in changing program operations. Program administrators are critical to the implementation

of continuous program improvement, and they need assistance in determining the ways in which they can provide their staff with time and resources to work together in examining the operation of their programs and implementing changes.

Policy, Training, and Technical Assistance

Policy. New policy issues that will need to be considered are:

- Incentives and strategies for programs to institutionalize and expand the improvement activities begun under Project EQuAL, including the provision of time, staff, and fiscal resources for planning, developing, and implementing program changes. Options need to be considered, such as reducing the number of learners served, so that there are resources for paying staff to engage in program improvement that will enhance the likelihood of success of the learners who are being served;

- Refinements in the performance standards to reflect the needs of the various learner subpopulations and service provider systems. The performance standards need to be revised to reflect the new reporting requirements under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act;

- Incentives and strategies for programs to change their curriculum and assessment processes, which are essential to the teaching and learning process and are among the most difficult types of program improvements. Strategies such as supporting the evaluation of innovative practices at the local level might be considered as one step in developing a base of information for program improvement;

- Strategies for providing extended learning through distance education and other methods to address the need for more time and intensity in instruction. One possibility is to designate pilot projects that would experiment with a range of existing distance learning tools (e.g., Crossroads Cafe, ALMA, Internet-based instruction developed by the Cyber STEP project) to determine methods for serving new populations of learners or extending the amount of instruction received by existing learners; and

- Strategies for programs to expand or change the roles of staff to provide adequate capacity for collecting, analyzing, and using data for all aspects of program operations, and for fostering learner articulation with other education, job training, and support services in the community. One possibility is to train a core of staff regionally who could provide assistance to programs in the collection and analysis of data and who would receive periodic follow-up training to enhance the quality of their skills in these activities.

Training and Technical Assistance. Two critical areas in which technical assistance is needed are:

- Analyzing program issues, identifying appropriate data collection and analysis methods, and interpreting data results; and

- Providing feedback to staff in their activities in conducting program self-assessment and preparing Data for Decision-Making Logs.

Workforce Investment Issues

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 poses a number of challenges to adult education in the unified plans that have been developed for the delivery of job training and basic skills. Issues that require attention are:

- Strategies for promoting interagency collaboration whereby learners can access the variety of support services that they need to meet their educational goals. Local program staff may require training in strategies for collaborating and negotiating agreements with other providers who can offer additional services to learners participating in adult education;

- Models for learner articulation so that learners are aware of and can access available education and job training services. To meet the requirements of the Workforce Investment Act, adult basic skills providers will need to participate in One-Stop systems to provide additional support to adult clients. Local adult education staff may require technical assistance in operating One-Stop services and strategies for participating in these services. The emerging national research on One-Stop systems would provide an information base from which technical assistance could be developed; and

- Strategies for promoting a coherent basic skills and job training system that builds upon and expands the resources in a community. At the state level, ABLE will need to continue its interagency activities in building relationships and developing policies that can facilitate the operation of an integrated service delivery system at the local level. At the local level, basic skills providers will need to be trained on how to develop a strategy for assisting in the development of an integrated service delivery system, which includes assistance in conducting an environmental scan of the services in their community, collaborating with service providers, and working with learners to motivate them to access the range of services that will be available.

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I. Pennsylvania's Approach to Systemic Change in Adult Education

Introduction

Since Summer 1994, the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education (ABLE) has led a statewide initiative to improve the quality of basic education and literacy services provided to adult learners in the state. Prompted in part by the federal and state call for accountability, but also by ABLE's desire to lead a large and diverse system of service providers in offering high quality education services to adults, Project Educational Quality in Adult Literacy (EQuAL) has changed the ways in which training, technical assistance, and local program operations in adult education are carried out in Pennsylvania. Through this initiative, state policies have been created to support new accountability requirements and training and technical assistance have been provided to improve the operation of basic education and literacy services.

As part of the development of Project EQuAL, ABLE commissioned COSMOS Corporation and subsequently Abt Associates Inc. to assist in creating, implementing, and documenting Project EQuAL's activities. This report, prepared by Abt Associates, describes ABLE's approach in creating Project EQuAL, EQuAL's activities that were undertaken during 1994-1998, the results from these activities, and recommendations for ABLE to consider in moving forward with Project EQuAL.

Project EQuAL's Objectives and Assumptions

Context for Project EQuAL. ABLE's main goal in establishing Project EQuAL was to begin a process of program improvement that would assist local adult education service providers in meeting new federal and state accountability requirements and in offering high quality literacy and basic education services to adults. Pennsylvania's large and diverse system of over 200 adult education service providers, consisting of school districts, intermediate units, community colleges, and community-based organizations, varies from agencies serving thousands of learners in the state's urban centers to smaller entities providing tutoring to adults in rural and urban settings. Prior to Project EQuAL, adult education service providers had been engaged in the process of defining program quality indicators and discussing possible ways of addressing the emerging accountability requirements. As the new director of ABLE considered the needs of Pennsylvania's adult education system, she determined that the establishment of a statewide initiative would help to create an environment for change through the development of information and tools for assisting service providers in meeting new requirements and encouraging continuous improvement. The idea was to use the development of performance standards as a starting point for a statewide initiative that would involve the alignment of

program development, training, and technical assistance with program needs in order to support learner outcomes and quality services.

Thus Project EQuAL was established with the following three objectives:

- To set performance standards that would facilitate adult education service providers' delivery of quality programs to adult learners;
- To institute a system of continuous program improvement for adult education service providers; and
- To develop a coordinated infrastructure of policy, program development, training, and technical assistance to support the delivery of high quality adult education services.

Guiding Assumptions. The Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education's director and staff made a number of assumptions in designing an initiative to meet these objectives. The first assumption was that change involves both a "top down" and "bottom up" process that is interactive and reinforcing. In the case of Project EQuAL, a "top down" approach was defined as the development of policies and program requirements to promote and guide change in basic education and literacy services. Since one of EQuAL's objectives was the implementation of performance standards, ABLE needed to set policies that delineated the standards and the requirements that local programs would have to meet as part of the standards. To ensure that programs had training and technical assistance resources to support their implementation of the standards, ABLE also had to provide a coherent array of materials and activities for program staff. To achieve this outcome, ABLE funded a coordinated set of projects with its National Literacy Act of 1991, Section 353 monies that supported the policy requirements that were being developed.

To balance the "top down" approach, ABLE created a "bottom up" process whereby a subset of service providers participated in the development of Project EQuAL through their activities as EQuAL Pilot programs. Twenty Pilot programs were the first implementers of EQuAL and, as such, contributed to the iterative process that characterized the evolution of the initiative. Another aspect of the "bottom up" character of Project EQuAL was the participation of the regional staff development providers in the creation of training and related materials to support the implementation of EQuAL.

ABLE's second assumption was that an infrastructure had to be built that would enable programs to improve the quality of their services, which in turn would result in improved learner outcomes, such as learning gains, program participation rates, and learners' satisfaction with the services being provided. ABLE's staff believed that this infrastructure would be comprised of policies, program development, and training and technical assistance ("top down" and "bottom up" processes) that could facilitate a local program's improvement activities. The framework that

specifies the components of Project EQuAL's infrastructure is presented in Exhibit I.1. As shown in the exhibit, ABLE's staff assumed that EQuAL's infrastructure would consist of a variety of program improvement activities that would lead to near-term changes in state policy in adult education as well as in the operational procedures of local adult education programs. Furthermore, the new policies and subsequent improvements in program operations would result in longer-term changes in programs as well as in outcomes for learners.

In creating a framework for the infrastructure, ABLE's staff thought that policies and technical assistance related to the use of learner assessment and data collection would be critical to the implementation of program standards and the systematic improvement of local programs. Thus they assumed that many of the near-term changes would be in assessment policies and practices, which would enable problems in the longer-term to collect quality assessment data that would reflect the learning gains of program participants.

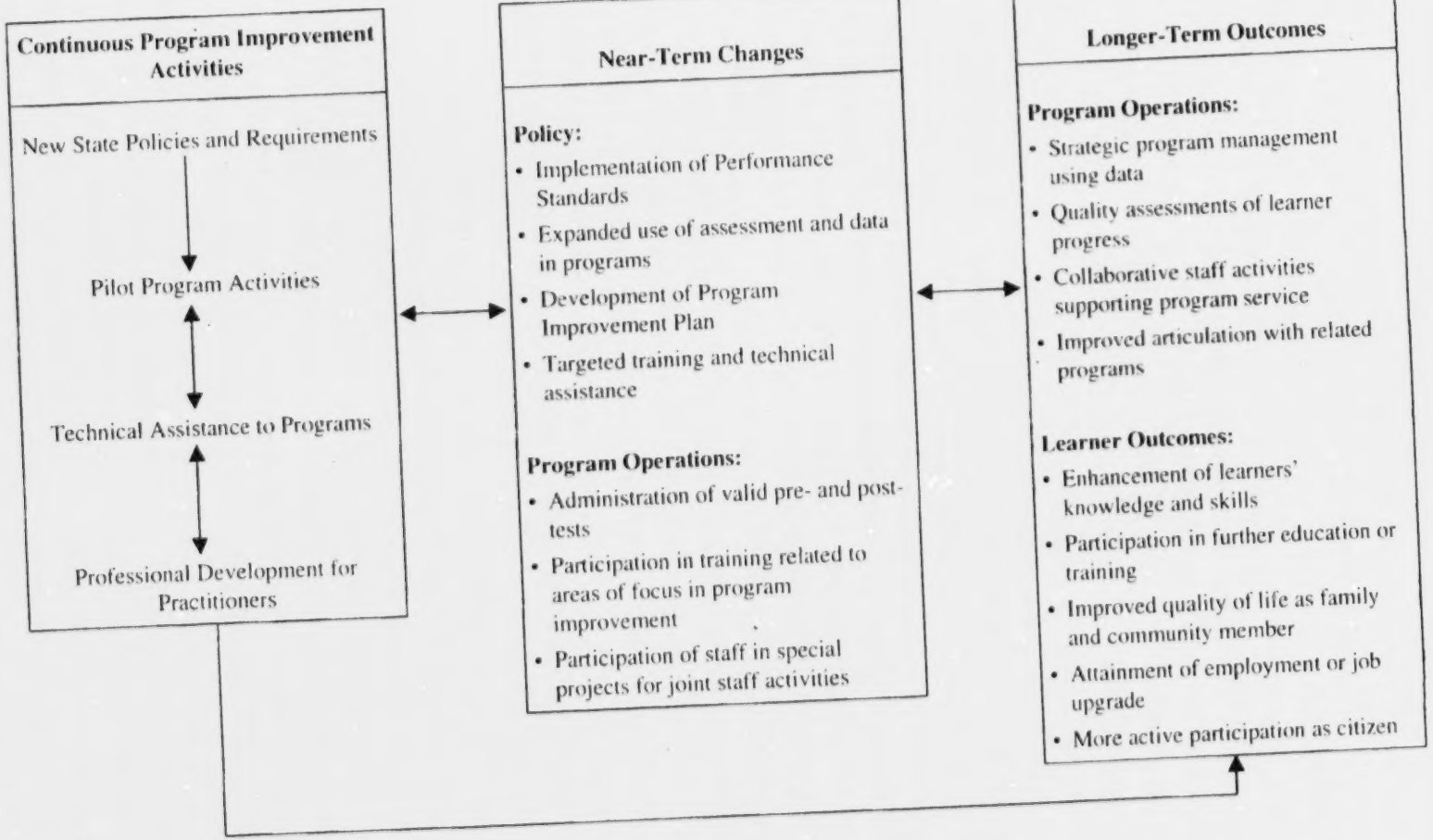
A final assumption that ABLE's staff made was that change takes time and the longer-term effects of program improvement—learning gains—would not be realized in the near-term. The experiences of states such as California and Connecticut that had implemented statewide initiatives provided some lessons to Pennsylvania in the development of EQuAL. ABLE's staff wanted to benefit from the experience of these other state adult education programs in crafting their initiative so that EQuAL could progress at a reasonable rate. One lesson from the other states' experiences concerned the types of practices that would have to be in place before longer-term gains could be realized and documented. These practices were accurate learner assessment, data reporting, data analysis, and quality instruction. Another lesson was about the types of technical assistance that would be needed to support local programs in refining their activities. In developing the framework for EQuAL's infrastructure, ABLE's staff both built upon and expanded the activities that other states had undertaken in designing their program improvement initiatives.

Approach to Program Improvement

ABLE's approach to a statewide program improvement process was to design an initiative that was multi-year, iterative in its development, and involved a variety of stakeholders. Because of the number and diversity of adult education service providers in the state, any process involving development, training, and technical assistance would have to be undertaken in stages. Thus Project EQuAL was designed to be a staged implementation process with a series of pilot activities, whereby an increasing number of service providers participated in training and technical assistance related to program development.

As part of ABLE's desire to build upon other states' experiences in creating an initiative, it procured the services of Judith Alamprese and her staff from COSMOS Corporation (who subsequently moved to Abt Associates Inc.), who had worked with California, Connecticut, and

Exhibit I.1
Project EQuAL Framework


Continuous Program Improvement Activities
New State Policies and Requirements
Pilot Program Activities
Technical Assistance to Programs
Professional Development for Practitioners
Near-Term Changes
Policy:
• Implementation of Performance Standards
• Expanded use of assessment and data in programs
• Development of Program Improvement Plan
• Targeted training and technical assistance
Program Operations:
• Administration of valid pre- and post-tests
• Participation in training related to areas of focus in program improvement
• Participation of staff in special projects for joint staff activities
Longer-Term Outcomes
Program Operations:
• Strategic program management using data
• Quality assessments of learner progress
• Collaborative staff activities supporting program service
• Improved articulation with related programs
Learner Outcomes:
• Enhancement of learners' knowledge and skills
• Participation in further education or training
• Improved quality of life as family and community member
• Attainment of employment or job upgrade
• More active participation as citizen

Oregon in their program improvement initiatives. The role of the external consultant was to assist ABLE in designing and implementing a statewide initiative, including the processes for setting performance standards, the types of interventions needed to assist programs in improving the quality of their services, policies to support standards and program improvement, and the training, technical assistance, and data collection processes to facilitate and document the change process.

Project EQuAL's Strategy. In creating the strategy for Project EQuAL, ABLE's director and staff wanted an initiative that could be a vehicle for refining the adult education system as well as for strengthening interagency relationships at the state and local level. While ABLE was focused on addressing the national call for accountability and performance standards in adult education, the staff also realized that this requirement was a part of the job training and social services systems providing services to many of the clients participating in adult education. ABLE's intent was to equip adult education service providers with an accountability system that could assist clients in achieving their goals and in receiving related services. In many ways, Project EQuAL was conceived as an initial step in a long process of developing a coherent human services delivery system for undereducated and economically disadvantaged adults in Pennsylvania.

ABLE's strategy for developing Project EQuAL was to carry out a number of critical activities, assess their effectiveness, and design new activities that built upon the previous ones. In this iterative process, ABLE's staff identified a number of principles that they wanted to guide EQuAL's process. These principles were the following:

- There should be an ongoing monitoring of programs and their practices to assure that programs are able to offer high quality services to adult learners;
- Outside experts should be utilized in designing and implementing Project EQuAL to assure that EQuAL builds upon the lessons learned by other states and incorporates new information being developed through research and evaluation;
- Key state and local stakeholders should be involved in the critical aspects of the design of EQuAL and in providing feedback concerning the implementation of EQuAL's activities;
- EQuAL's interventions should be developmental and begin with a set of pilot programs whereby the interventions are evaluated, revised, and expanded to additional programs;
- Products and training will need to be developed and technical assistance provided to support service providers in their continuous improvement activities;

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- Key change agents from local programs who are involved in the early implementation of Project EQuAL will be critical in assisting other programs in participating in EQuAL; and

- Policies and processes will need to be continually reviewed to assure that they are adequate for guiding service providers and for addressing new requirements that may arise.

At the heart of this strategy were two goals: to facilitate the operation of high quality adult education programs that, in turn, would assist adult learners in achieving outcomes that could improve the quality of their lives. ABLE's strategy for Project EQuAL is depicted in Exhibit I.2. As the exhibit indicates, EQuAL was conceived of as a series of sequential processes that would build upon one another and support the two main goals. ABLE's staff also thought that these processes could be used in developing a number of specific programmatic interventions. For example, while an initial EQuAL activity was to develop performance standards, ABLE's staff recognized that other activities supporting program improvement would be needed and they wanted a strategy to use in implementing various interventions that would support continuous program improvement.

Implementation Stages. When ABLE began Project EQuAL in the Summer 1994, the staff thought of it as a three-year initiative to implement performance standards in all basic education and literacy programs and to provide these programs with tools and materials to improve their programs. As the first two years of the initiative progressed, the complexity of facilitating change in the state's diverse adult education system became apparent to ABLE staff, and the director revised the time line for EQuAL's activities. Project EQuAL is now in its sixth year of implementation and continues to grow in scope and breadth.

The first four years of EQuAL encompassed a variety of activities aimed at building an infrastructure for continuous improvement in all state-funded basic education and literacy programs. The stages of implementing Project EQuAL during this period, presented in Exhibit I.3, were the following:

- **Planning and Policy Development—Phase I:** Consistent with the principle of having an ongoing monitoring system, EQuAL's first set of activities was to revise the state's process for monitoring basic skills and literacy programs to align it with the indicators of program quality. The procedures for setting performance standards for adult education programs also were developed, as was the conceptualization for the process of beginning a continuous improvement process with a set of pilot programs;

- **EQuAL Pilot 1/Performance Standards Data Collection:** During the first year, staff from 10 Pilot 1 sites were trained to form EQuAL improvement teams and conduct a problem-solving process to analyze data and improve their programs. Initial assessment

Exhibit I.2
Strategy for Implementing a State Initiative on Program Improvement

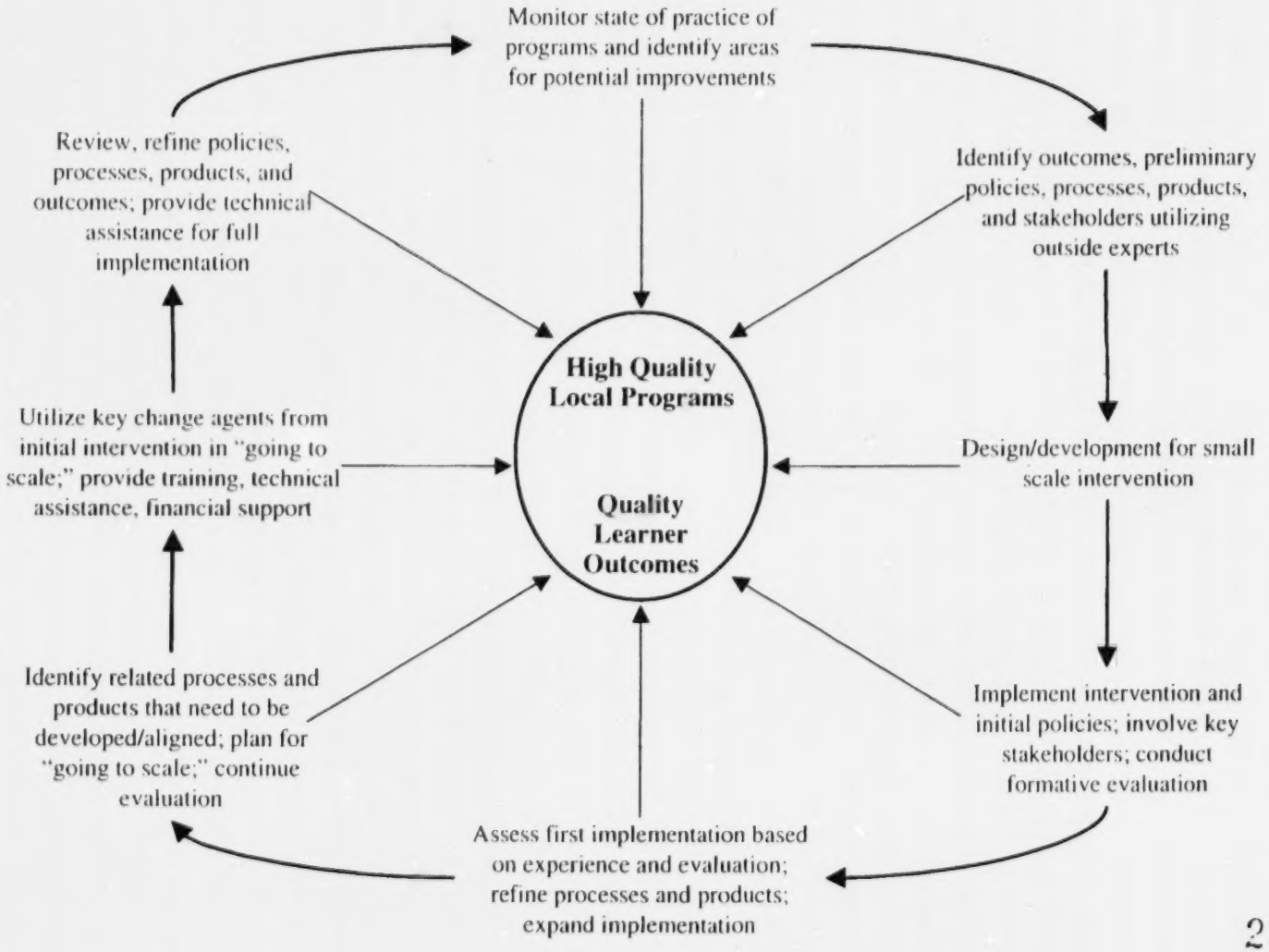
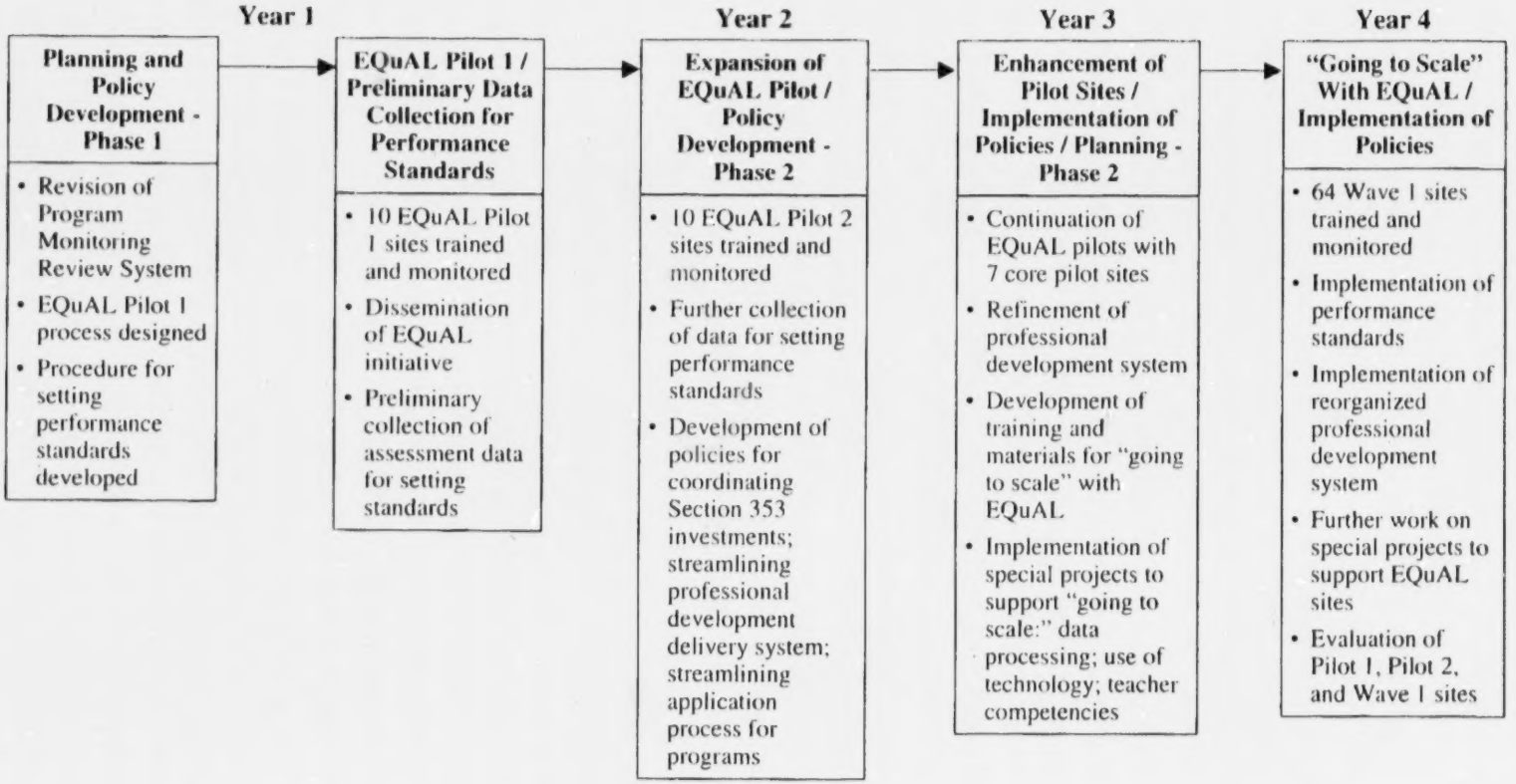

Monitor state of practice of programs and identify areas for potential improvements
Identify outcomes, preliminary policies, processes, products, and stakeholders utilizing outside experts
Design/development for small scale intervention
Implement intervention and initial policies; involve key stakeholders; conduct formative evaluation
Assess first implementation based on experience and evaluation; refine processes and products; expand implementation
Identify related processes and products that need to be developed/aligned; plan for "going to scale;" continue evaluation
Utilize key change agents from initial intervention in "going to scale;" provide training, technical assistance, financial support
Review, refine policies, processes, products, and outcomes; provide technical assistance for full implementation
High Quality Local Programs
Quality Learner Outcomes

Exhibit I.3
Project EQuAL: Stages of Implementation


Year 1
Planning and Policy Development - Phase 1
• Revision of Program Monitoring Review System
• EQuAL Pilot 1 process designed
• Procedure for setting performance standards developed
EQuAL Pilot 1 / Preliminary Data Collection for Performance Standards
• 10 EQuAL Pilot 1 sites trained and monitored
• Dissemination of EQuAL initiative
• Preliminary collection of assessment data for setting standards
Year 2
Expansion of EQuAL Pilot / Policy Development - Phase 2
• 10 EQuAL Pilot 2 sites trained and monitored
• Further collection of data for setting performance standards
• Development of policies for coordinating Section 353 investments; streamlining professional development delivery system; streamlining application process for programs
Year 3
Enhancement of Pilot Sites / Implementation of Policies / Planning - Phase 2
• Continuation of EQuAL pilots with 7 core pilot sites
• Refinement of professional development system
• Development of training and materials for "going to scale" with EQuAL
• Implementation of special projects to support "going to scale:" data processing; use of technology; teacher competencies
Year 4
"Going to Scale" With EQuAL / Implementation of Policies
• 64 Wave 1 sites trained and monitored
• Implementation of performance standards
• Implementation of reorganized professional development system
• Further work on special projects to support EQuAL sites
• Evaluation of Pilot 1, Pilot 2, and Wave 1 sites

data also were collected for determining the state's performance standards, and ABLE announced the inception of the EQuAL initiative;

- **Expansion of EQuAL Pilot/Policy Development—Phase 2:** During EQuAL's second year, 10 Pilot 2 sites were trained and there was further collection of assessment data for setting draft performance standards. ABLE began the development of policies for coordinating its National Literacy Act of 1991, Section 353 funding for special projects to support the assessment and program improvement activities underway with Project EQuAL;

- **Enhancement of Pilot Sites/Implementation of Policies and Planning—Phase 2:** During the third year, ABLE began its plan for expanding programs' participation in EQuAL beyond the pilot sites. A process for identifying the next "wave" of EQuAL sites was determined and training and materials for supporting EQuAL's expansion were created. Seven of the Pilot programs were designated as "core pilot sites" and enhanced their EQuAL activities by increasing the number of staff from their programs participating in the problem-solving process. Additional special projects were funded to develop materials for facilitating program improvement and for reorganizing the state's professional development system; and

- **"Going to Scale" with EQuAL/Implementation of Policies:** During EQuAL's fourth year, 64 Wave 1 sites were trained. Basic education and literacy service providers were required to address the state's performance standards for adult education, and the reorganized professional development system provided training and technical assistance to the Wave 1 sites. Abt Associates Inc. also evaluated the activities supporting the expansion of Project EQuAL. A list of the Pilot, Core, and Wave 1 sites is presented in Appendix A.

These stages of implementation activities were developed with the idea that each stage required policy and program development as well as experimentation with local programs. Thus EQuAL's approach as exemplified in its implementation strategy was to build an improved system by developing policies to facilitate change in local program activities that were supported by training and technical assistance. Over the four years, Project EQuAL became the focal point for ABLE's activities in coordinating a systemic change process throughout the state's adult education system. What began as an initiative to set performance standards and encourage continuous program improvement gradually emerged into a framework for organizing professional development and special project activities for fostering program improvement.

II. PROJECT EQUAL ACTIVITIES

During the period 1994-1998, a variety of activities were carried out under Project EQuAL to support the development of performance standards and build an infrastructure for a continuous improvement system in adult education. These activities, which are presented in the timeline in Exhibit II.1, were of the following types:

- Intervention processes and policies that ABLE developed to guide service providers in continuous program improvement;
- Products that service providers could use in operating their programs;
- Training and technical assistance to facilitate change in service provider operations; and
- Monitoring and evaluation activities to track the progress of EQuAL and identify needed processes and products.

Intervention Processes and Policies

Monitoring Review System. An initial step in setting performance standards was the refinement of the state's system for monitoring basic education and literacy programs. The external consultant, working with ABLE's director and staff, revised the process and materials that the state staff used in conducting monitoring visits annually to a sample of programs funded with National Literacy Act of 1991 monies. This activity included the alignment of program areas for monitoring under the state's indicators of quality programs and the inclusion of systematic data collection tools for gathering information from instructors and a sample of learners. In keeping with Project EQuAL's developmental strategy of pilot testing and revision, the external consultant trained the ABLE staff to use the new process and materials; collected data about their pilot testing of this process; and then refined the process based on the experience of the staff. A major goal of ABLE's revised monitoring system was to reinforce to service providers the new emphasis on program accountability by having program staff focus on quality indicators in their review of their activities.

Project Design. A key decision that ABLE's director and staff had to make in designing Project EQuAL was the magnitude and sequencing of the initiative. Based on the lessons learned from other states, ABLE determined that EQuAL would begin with a pilot project of 10 basic skills and literacy service providers that was representative of the range of organizations and agencies sponsoring basic education and literacy services. The notion was to start small, learn from the experiences of the pilot sites, and then expand the number and types of programs participating in the initiative. Another consideration in selecting the first 10 Pilot sites was to choose programs

Exhibit II.1
Timeline of Key Project EQuAL Activities

Year 1 1994 - 1995	Summer 1994	Fall 1994	Winter 1995	Spring 1995
Training and Technical Assistance (TA), and Evaluation	• Developed Monitoring Review System • Designed EQuAL Pilot 1 Project	• Met with EQuAL Advisory Committee • Participated in statewide teleconference • Developed EQuAL training materials • Selected sample for tracking learner assessment	• Conducted EQuAL Pilot 1 training with 10 sites • Provided TA to Pilot 1 sites • Reviewed data collection forms and progress of pilots with site coordinators	• Conducted mail survey of instructors and tutors • Conducted telephone interviews with Pilot 1 site coordinators • Conducted Year 1 review meeting with sites and Advisory Committee
State and Local EQuAL Activities	• Stated formed EQuAL Advisory Committee • State developed guidelines for EQuAL Pilot 1 sites	• State piloted Monitoring Review System • State selected Pilot 1sites	• Pilot 1 sites completed Learner Assessment and Data for Program Management Forms; conducted EQuAL meetings • State developed plan for Pilot 2 and selected sites	
Year 2 1995 - 1996	**Summer 1995**	**Fall 1995**	**Winter 1996**	**Spring 1996**
Training and Technical Assistance (TA), and Evaluation	• Developed materials for Pilot Training • Revised Monitoring Review System materials	• Conducted training for Pilot 1 and 2 sites • Provided TA to pilot sites • Collected assessment data on 1,800 learners and Data for Decision-Making Logs	• Conducted telephone interviews with pilot site coordinators to monitor activities	• Conducted review meeting of Year 2 activities with site coordinators and instructors • Participated in COABE conference • Conducted mail survey with 100 staff from Pilot 1 and 2 sites • Conducted telephone interviews with Pilot 1and 2 coordinators and program directors

Exhibit II.1 (Continued)
Timeline of Key Project EQuAL Activities

Year 3 1996 - 1997	Summer 1996	Fall 1996	Winter 1997	Spring 1997
Technical Assistance (TA), Training, and Evaluation	• Analyzed Learner Assessment Logs for developing performance standards • Developed training materials for Year 3 of EQuAL	• Provided TA to state in specifying performance standards • Conducted Year 3 EQuAL training • Collected Data for Decision-Making Logs →	• Conducted Project EQuAL Working Group meeting to develop framework for training materials	• Conducted site visits to seven core sites • Provided TA to pilot sites
State and Local EQuAL Activities	• State reviewed policies and products for planning for taking Project EQuAL to scale	• State developed plan for taking Project EQuAL to scale with Wave 1 sites	• State issued application for Wave 1 sites • State issued draft Performance Standards • State developed plan for realigning staff development system	• State awarded special projects for training and product development supporting EQuAL sites

Year 4 1997 - 1998	Summer 1997	Fall 1997	Winter 1998	Spring 1998
Technical Assistance (TA) and Evaluation	• Provided TA to state staff and Statewide Implementation Team		• Participated in EQuAL Implementation Strategic Planning session	• Conducted survey of Pilot 1 and 2 sites • Conducted survey of Wave 1 sites • Conducted survey of Statewide Implementation Team
State and Local EQuAL Activities	• Statewide Implementation Team developed training • State developed guidelines for Wave 1 implementation	• Statewide Implementation Teams trained and provided TA to 64 Wave 1 EQuAL sites		• State reviewed program data for Performance Standards

where staff capacity could be developed for providing training and technical assistance to subsequent EQuAL participants. Thus ABLE included in the Pilot 1 sites programs with directors and staff who had experience in developing special projects supported under the National Literacy Act of 1991's Section 353 funds and who were part of the state's regional staff development system. The strategy with the Pilot 1 process was to both test new processes and develop capacity for transferring these processes.

During the second year, 10 additional programs were selected as Pilot 2 sites. These programs served the same purposes as the Pilot 1 sites—providing assessment data for determining performance standards and participating in the Project EQuAL intervention described below. The Pilot 1 and 2 sites continued through the third year of the initiative, when seven of these sites were selected as Core Pilot sites and were asked to focus their activities on program improvement and expand the number of staff in their programs involved in EQuAL.

The next phase of the design of Project EQuAL was to determine how to take the initiative to "scale." During the third year, ABLE, the external consultant, and key staff from the Pilot sites developed a process for expanding the number of programs participating in EQuAL. During the fourth year, 64 basic skills and literacy service providers were selected through ABLE's annual application process to become Wave 1 EQuAL sites.

For each iteration of pilot and wave sites, the programs were asked to select a Project EQuAL team comprised of three to four staff members, including a program coordinator or staff member who had sufficient responsibility to effect change among the instructional staff. The objective of the EQuAL implementation team was to pilot the Project EQuAL intervention and to serve as an incubator for testing processes and products developed under EQuAL. The intent was for this team then to work with other staff members in institutionalizing Project EQuAL.

To support the team's activities, EQuAL sites were given a modest amount of funding each year ($3,000-$5,000) for team meeting time and travel to EQuAL meetings. The idea was to stimulate the programs' EQuAL activities by providing them with some additional funding. ABLE expected that the programs eventually would incorporate these activities into their ongoing program operations. During EQuAL's fourth year, the additional federal monies that ABLE received for providing adult education services was used to fund the Wave 1 sites.

Performance Standards. A key focus of Project EQuAL's first year was designing the process for setting performance standards. The external consultant worked with ABLE's director in developing this process based on the work that she had undertaken with Connecticut's adult education system. This design was to collect learner assessment data on a sample of learners from the 10 Pilot 1 programs to determine: 1) the accuracy of the assessment data, and 2) the average gain made by learners. Since other states had found that adult basic education service providers often do not administer standardized assessment instruments in a reliable and valid manner, ABLE determined that the process of examining the quality of assessment data was

critical to the eventual implementation of standards. The approach of setting standards by examining the average gain made by learners was one of setting relative standards—i.e., standards based on the performance of learners relative to each other. While setting absolute standards—i.e., standards based on learners' performance related to their achievement of a goal—would have been preferable, there were no data available about the long-term outcomes of participants from basic skills and literacy programs to use in determining the standards. Thus, ABLE chose to set the draft performance standards using learner data about relative performance.

Both Pilot 1 and 2 sites collected assessment for setting the draft performance standards and the external consultant analyzed these data for ABLE. While the original design was to determine the draft standards based on the Pilot 1 sites' assessment data, the number of valid pre- and post-test scores was insufficient for the analysis. Thus the data collection activity was extended to include the 10 Pilot 2 sites. The Pilot sites' experience collecting assessment data was very informative and drew attention to an identified an area in which training and technical assistance was needed. During the third year, ABLE issued the draft performance standards that were then reviewed and reissued during the Fall 1998.

EQuAL Intervention. Another part of the design activity was to determine the type of intervention that would constitute Project EQuAL. Because the long-term goal for EQuAL was continuous program improvement, a problem-solving process was created that staff from basic education and literacy programs could use in identifying problems or questions about their programs, collecting and analyzing about these problems, drawing conclusions about the possible causes of the problem, and identifying and trying solutions. The external consultant trained the Pilot site EQuAL teams to engage in a problem-solving process using a Data for Decision-Making Log (Exhibit II.2). The goal of this process was to encourage staff to analyze their program operations using various types of data that programs collect, including intake information, attendance, learner assessment, instructional processes, and curricular materials. The teams were asked to meet monthly or every six weeks to work on a problem and to complete the log. Over the four-year period, the questions on the log were revised slightly to reflect the feedback from the Pilot sites. This problem-solving process was considered to be the basis for identifying program improvements that staff might make in an effort to offer quality educational services to adults.

The EQuAL sites have utilized the Data for Decision-Making Logs with differing degrees of success. The external consultant provided technical assistance during the first two years of the initiative by conducting periodic telephone interviews with EQuAL coordinators at the Pilot sites to answer questions about the problem-solving process and provide suggestions. During the fourth year, the EQuAL Implementation team provided this assistance. At sites where the team has used the process effectively, team members have met regularly and carried out a systematic

Exhibit II.2

Project EQuAL
1996 - 1997

DATA FOR DECISION-MAKING LOG

Name of pilot project site: _____

Person(s) who completed this Log: _____

Date of Completion: _____

1. Write a question about the program that you want to answer (e.g., curriculum and instruction, learner retention, support services, staff development).

2. List the information that the program needs to answer the question. (The site must use data that the program currently collects or can easily collect to do the log.)

3. Describe the analysis you used (e.g., frequency distribution, increase or decrease over time, pre and post). Please attach any charts, tables, or graphs that were used to summarize data.

4. What conclusion(s) do you draw after analyzing the data?

5. What changes, based on the analysis, might be suggested for the program?

6. Who or what group of persons can make the decision to implement change(s)?

7. List the resources you will need (e.g., release time, staff training, additional class space) and the steps you will take to carry out the changes (e.g., design new materials; hold training; revise procedures).

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examination of one or more aspects of their programs to identify problems, solutions, and action steps. Factors facilitating this process have been leadership provided by the EQuAL coordinator, support from the program's administrator in enabling staff to meet regularly, staff's access to program information, and the staff's capacity to take some steps in addressing program issues. At sites where the problem-solving process has been less successful, one or more of these elements has been missing.

Advisory Committee. A key principle of EQuAL was to involve a variety of stakeholders early in the initiative. ABLE formed an EQuAL Committee comprised of representatives from the basic skills and literacy service provider system as well as from vocational education, labor, and human services. This Committee met two times during the first year and then ABLE's director kept them apprised of EQuAL's activities in subsequent years. The committee was helpful in reacting to the design for EQuAL and in early dissemination.

Program Self-Assessment. During the third year of EQuAL, one of the Pilot 1 site directors who also conducted special projects and managed one of the regional staff development centers began the process of creating a self-assessment process for EQuAL sites. The intention was to have a process and instrument that staff could use in reviewing the strengths and weaknesses of their programs. This process was developed to complement the monitoring review system that the ABLE staff were using in their site reviews, as well as to stimulate effective problem-solving in the EQuAL implementation. In keeping with the EQuAL approach, the self-assessment instrument and process were pilot tested and revised. The instrument is a checklist that presents the key program areas related to the functioning of a basic education and literacy program with the types of activities that staff might undertake under each area. Staff are to rate the quality of their program activities in each area of operations. While programs have found the checklist helpful in focusing their discussions about program activities and areas in need of improvement, it also has taken time for staff to meet and rate each area of operation thoughtfully.

This issue of staff time for meeting and discussing program operations is similar to that encountered in the use of the Data for Decision-Making Logs. While staff may value the activity of the systematic examination of their programs, they find it difficult to take the time to meet as a group, review their program activities, and then determine the steps that they might take to address the issues that they have identified. While one goal of Project EQuAL has been to institutionalize the staff's activity of taking the time to analyze program problems, it has been challenging to get them to view this time as a necessary part of their program responsibilities.

Alignment of Section 353-Funded Projects. An important policy activity that ABLE undertook was to coordinate the types of National Adult Literacy Act of 1991, Section 353 special projects that it funds. These monies generally supported program development, training, technical assistance, and evaluation activities. As EQuAL progressed, ABLE recognized the necessity to provide various tools to the pilot sites to facilitate their program improvement activities. In

addition, the process of setting draft performance standards pointed to the need for training and technical assistance in the administration and use of learner assessment instruments.

As ABLE set its Section 353 priorities beginning in the second year of Project EQuAL, consideration was given to the issues concerning training and technical assistance that arose in the EQuAL implementation. To address these issues, ABLE specified projects that provided training for assessment and other identified skill-building related to staff competencies; product development to support going to scale with EQuAL; and technical assistance to facilitate EQuAL team activities. ABLE also funded projects such as the Literacy Pro management information system pilot implementation and practitioner inquiry projects that complemented the activities being undertaken with EQuAL.

Professional Development System. One policy that ABLE developed during the third year of EQuAL was to reduce the number of professional development centers (PDCs) in the state to six. As part of its overall effort to reduce the number of providers in the adult education service delivery system, ABLE also wanted to streamline the delivery of professional development services. In reorganizing the PDCs, ABLE expanded their responsibilities to include the provision of technical assistance to the Wave 1 EQuAL sites that began operation during the Fall 1997.

ABLE Application Procedures and Program Guidelines. In the interest of promoting continuous program improvement, ABLE revised the application process for service providers to receive funding for adult education services. As part of the application process, programs now have to participate in the self-assessment process; submit data to address the performance standards; and participate in assessment training.

Products

ABLE has supported the development and revision of a number of products to assist programs in meeting the performance standards and engaging in program improvement. These have included:

- An assessment manual that guides program staff in the selection and use of learner assessment instruments and processes;
- Self-Assessment Checklist that programs can use in determining the areas of program operations that might need enhancement and those that are working well;
- Data for Decision-Making Log that staff can use in guiding their discussions about program issues and problems, and in developing an action plan to address program issues; and

- Adult Learner Skills Competencies manual that lists core basic skills and life skills application areas.

The first three products were developed as part of the Project EQuAL intervention activities for programs to use. The Skills Competencies manual was prepared as part of ABLE's activity in providing programs with guidance for curriculum design.

Training and Technical Assistance

The state's training and technical assistance system evolved over the first four years of EQuAL from a system that addressed a wide variety of topics and staff needs to a more focused delivery of services. With the implementation of EQuAL came the need for new training materials and processes as well as different content for technical assistance. The transformation of training and technical assistance followed the EQuAL strategy. The external consultant developed the early training and technical assistance materials, revised them based on the experience of the Pilot sites, and then worked with adult education training staff from the PDCs in transferring procedures that had been developed and in designing new materials and processes. During the third year, the external consultant assisted an EQuAL Working Group in developing a framework for training modules that could be used in going to scale or expanding the use of EQuAL in all basic skills and literacy programs.

By the fourth year of EQuAL, the external consultant no longer delivered training. An EQuAL Implementation Team comprised of approximately 50 individuals from the PDCs became responsible for providing training and technical assistance to the 64 Wave 1 sites. The external consultant worked with the primary trainers from this group in reviewing their experiences and helping to determine the revision of training and technical assistance processes.

Monitoring and Evaluation Activities

Throughout Project EQuAL, the external consultant has collected data to monitor the implementation of the Pilot 1 and 2 sites and to determine the needs for technical assistance. During the fourth year of EQuAL, when the external consultant was no longer providing training and technical assistance, she worked with her staff in collecting data on the implementation of the Wave 1 sites. A summary of the data collection activities is presented in Exhibit II.3. The results of these activities are discussed in the next section of the report.

The ongoing collection of information from EQuAL sites has been an important part of the statewide initiative. One of its purposes has been to obtain feedback from sites about the processes developed as part of EQuAL, programs' ease in undertaking change, and issues that

Exhibit II.3
Summary of Data Collection Activities

Data Collection Activity	Description
Pilot 1 Telephone Interviews	The 10 Pilot 1 sites began with Project EQuAL in 1994-95. Telephone interviews were conducted with all 10 sites in May 1995, January 1996, and May 1996.
Pilot 2 Telephone Interviews	The 10 Pilot 2 sites began with Project EQuAL in 1995-96. Telephone interviews were conducted with all 10 sites January 1996, and May 1996.
Site Visits to Core Programs	The Core programs are Pilot 1 and 2 sites that were selected to do additional implementation during 1996-97. Abt Associates staff conducted on-site interviews with staff from all 7 Core programs during 1997.
Survey of Pilot 1 and 2 Programs (1996)	By 1996, two Pilot programs had ceased participating in EQuAL, leaving 18. Each of the 18 programs completed written surveys in May 1996.
Analysis of Pilot 1 and 2 Log Questions (1995-1997)	A review was conducted of the Pilot 1 and 2 sites' Data for Decision-Making Logs completed from 1995 - 1997. This period represented the second and third years in Project EQuAL for the Pilot 1 sites, and the first and second years for Pilot 2 sites.
Survey of Pilot 1 and 2 Programs (1998)	During 1998, another program left the project, leaving 17 Pilots. Each of the 17 programs completed written surveys in May 1998.
Survey of Wave 1 Programs (1998)	The 64 programs that started with Project EQuAL in 1997-98 are known as Wave 1 sites. Surveys were mailed to the 64 Wave 1 sites in May 1998. Fifty-two returned surveys, representing an 81 percent response rate.
Survey of Statewide Implementation Team (1998)	The 23 members of the Statewide Implementation Team provide training and technical assistance to programs implementing Project EQuAL. Each of these individuals received a survey in July 1998. Thirteen Team members returned surveys, representing a 57 percent response rate.

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ABLE needed to address in coordinating a systemic change process. The data collection also provided information about the sequence of the change process. For example, programs were given flexibility in selecting the program issues that they could choose to address in the Data for Decision-Making Logs. It was useful to have information that could trace the types of issues or problems that successive EQuAL sites addressed over time. Finally, the data collection provided some initial data about the near-term outcomes from Project EQuAL.

III. Outcomes from Project EQuAL

During the first four years of Project EQuAL, the basic skills and literacy programs involved in the initiative focused on implementing a systematic process for identifying and solving problems that hindered the delivery of services. This approach was based on the assumption that the provision of quality services would result in improved outcomes for program participants. While good learner outcomes were thought to be the ultimate goal of quality services, ABLE recognized that, in the near-term, the effects of EQuAL would need to be assessed in terms of the extent to which programs were adopting a problem-solving process. This section describes the activities that EQuAL sites have undertaken toward implementing and institutionalizing this process.

Assistance Provided by EQuAL Implementation Team

Beginning in the fourth year of Project EQuAL, staff from the Professional Development Centers and the EQuAL Pilot sites became part of a statewide EQuAL Implementation Team that was responsible for providing training and technical assistance to the 64 Wave 1 programs that began EQuAL during 1997-98. During July 1998, Abt Associates' research staff conducted a survey of the Implementation Team members to gather data on the types of assistance they had provided to Wave 1 sites, the barriers they experienced in providing this assistance, and the steps that might be taken to enable them to provide better technical assistance. Thirteen of the 23 Implementation Team members completed a survey.

The survey results indicated that the EQuAL Implementation Team members provided assistance to 34 (65 percent) of the Wave 1 sites. As indicated in Exhibit III.1, the most commonly reported types of assistance provided concerned the use of the Data for Decision-Making Logs and the application of technology, (e.g., help with the listserv, support with data entry/information management). These categories of assistance reflect the team members' charge of assisting programs with the problem-solving process and helping them to meet ABLE's requirements for learner accountability, including the use of a management information system.

The main difficulties that Team members had in providing training and technical assistance to sites were related to the use of the Data for Decision-Making Logs. As shown in Exhibit III.2, some Team members did not feel qualified to provide feedback on the logs to sites, primarily because of their lack of experience in analyzing logs and formulating advice based on the analysis. Other team members thought that the greatest challenge was assisting programs in using the log process as an instrument for change.

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Exhibit III.1
Technical Assistance Received by Wave 1 Sites from Statewide Implementation Team

Types of Technical Assistance	Number and percent of Wave 1 Sites Reporting Having Received Technical Assistance	
	Frequency (n = 52 sites)	Percent
No assistance received or requested	18	34.6
Assistance received, but no type specified	13	25.0
Assistance with data for decision-making logs	9	17.3
Assistance on technology-related issues	9	17.3
Assistance with the listserv	5	9.6
Assistance for data entry / information management	3	5.8
Assistance with using computers	1	1.9
Assistance on purchase information	3	5.8

Data source: Survey of Wave 1 programs, Summer 1998

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Exhibit III.2
Difficulties Encountered in Providing Technical Assistance and Training to Sites and Types of Professional Development Requested by Team Members

Types of Difficulties Encountered by Team Members	Frequency and percent of Team Members Reporting	
	Frequency (n = 13 team members)	Percent
Team members did not feel qualified to provide assistance due to lack of experience with logs or adult education in general.	4	30.8
Sites needed more training and/or experience with the data for decision-making logs.	4	30.8
Team members had a lack of knowledge about Project EQuAL specifics and/or PDE procedures, and could not always answer sites' questions.	3	23.1
Team members had a lack of time to adequately assist sites.	3	23.1
There was a lack of direct communication between team members and sites.	2	15.4
Types of Professional Development Requested by Team Members		
Data for decision-making log process, including question formation, data collection, data analysis	7	53.8
Sharing lessons learned of Implementation Team members	3	23.1
No professional development requested	3	23.1
Overview of the administrative and funding structures of adult education programs	1	7.7

Data source: Survey of Statewide Implementation Team, Summer 1998
Respondents could give more than one answer.

Eighty-five percent of the Team members responding to the survey cited the completion of logs as difficult for sites, and several pointed to the formation of a good research question as the major obstacle within the process. One Team member's response seemed to capture this issue: "There are some sites who tried to attack all of their agency problems/issues at once instead of focusing on one issue or question. In other words, some sites presented material that could be addressed over several different logs." Another wrote, "(Sites) have trouble asking questions that are answerable and that deal with small steps rather than huge, overarching issues." Sites also had to address program barriers. Team members mentioned inadequate program leadership and logistical problems (i.e., getting staff to meet regularly) as some of these obstacles.

When Team members were asked to identify a type of training that would be most helpful to them, more than half (54 percent) of the survey respondents requested assistance related to the log process, including question formation, data collection, and data analysis. Twenty-three percent of the respondents thought that it would be beneficial to share lessons learned with other Team members. Another 23 percent did not request any type of professional development. Presented in Exhibit III.2 is a list of the types of training that Team members requested.

Team members were asked what Project EQuAL could do to help programs succeed in making improvements. The survey respondents indicated that the Implementation Team should have increased interaction with EQuAL program staff. Suggestions included more face-to-face meetings, or regular phone or email conversations that could help program staff work through the log process. Other suggestions, included in Exhibit III.3, were providing additional training for programs, giving programs more time to implement Project EQuAL in general, and offering more training for Implementation Team members on how to give feedback to programs on their Data for Decision-Making Logs.

Pilot Site Outcomes

Abt Associates' research staff administered a survey to 17 Pilot 1 and Pilot 2 sites in the Spring of 1998 to determine the progress that these programs had made in using the problem-solving process and the changes that they had undertaken as a result. All 17 of the sites responded to the survey. The first section of the survey provided respondents with a list of the steps toward program change that they had indicated on their Data for Decision-Making forms during the 1996-97 program year. As Exhibit III.4 indicates, most of the Pilot sites proposed that they would take six (35 percent of sites) or seven action steps (41 percent of sites). Respondents then were asked to indicate which of these steps they had fully or partially implemented and to describe the changes that their programs had made as a result of these activities. Among the programs that indicated they would take seven steps, six programs implemented six of the steps, while two programs implemented seven and four steps, respectively (Exhibit III.4). Among the programs that proposed to take six steps, five implemented all six of those steps, while two programs implemented six and three steps, respectively.

Exhibit III.3
Suggestions from Statewide Implementation Team Members of Ways that Project EQuAL Can Help Programs Make Improvements

Suggested Ways Project EQuAL Can Help Programs	Frequency and percent of Team Members' Suggested Ways Project EQuAL Can Help Programs Make Improvements	
	Frequency (n = 13 members)	Percent
More interaction between Team members and program staff	7	53.8
More training for program staff for data for decision-making logs, assessment modules, etc.	5	38.5
More time for programs to move through the program improvement process	2	15.4
More training for Team members regarding giving feedback to programs on their data for decision-making logs	2	15.4

Data source: Survey of Statewide Implementation Team, Summer 1998
Respondents could give more than one answer.

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Exhibit III.4
Number of Action Steps Planned and Implemented by Pilot 1 and Pilot 2 Sites

Number of Action Steps Planned by Pilot 1 and Pilot 2 Sites	Number and Percent of Pilot Sites	
	Frequency (n = 17 sites)	Percent
7 action steps planned	7	41.2
6 action steps planned	6	35.3
5 action steps planned	3	17.6
3 action steps planned	1	5.9
Number of Steps Planned / Number of Steps Implemented		
7 steps proposed / 7 steps implemented	1	5.9
7 steps proposed / 6 steps implemented	5	29.4
7 steps proposed / 4 steps implemented	1	5.9
6 steps proposed / 6 steps implemented	1	5.9
6 steps proposed / 5 steps implemented	4	23.5
6 steps proposed / 3 steps implemented	1	5.9
5 steps proposed / 4 steps implemented	2	11.8
5 steps proposed / 3 steps implemented	1	5.9
3 steps proposed / 3 steps implemented	1	5.9

Data source: Survey of Pilot Sites, Spring 1998

The types of changes that programs undertook as a result of the problem-solving process can be categorized under eight areas of basic skills and literacy program activities, as shown in Exhibit III.5. Most of the Pilot sites made changes in program management, curriculum and instruction, and/or assessment. In program management, the most frequently cited activities were the development of record-keeping/ information management systems (47 percent) or the preparation of handbooks that are provided to learners and staff (18 percent). For example, one site explained, "We have continued to track our students for total gain. Reporting sheets for each class were designed for institutional implementation of this process."

In the area of curriculum and instruction, Pilot site staff reported upgrading instructional technology (24 percent), revising the curricula (24 percent), and/or implementing changes to class schedules (24 percent). Staff from one program observed, "Following the 12 hour staff development workshop covering computer literacy, slowly but surely computers are infiltrating each classroom." Changes pertaining to assessment involved both the use of assessment instruments (35 percent) and the development of procedures (29 percent). Other broad categories into which program changes fell included staff development (47 percent), tutor issues (24 percent), learner retention (18 percent) and motivation (12 percent), and recruitment (12 percent).

When asked to identify the factors that facilitated their implementation of change, Pilot site respondents cited high quality staff (88 percent of sites) and funding (76 percent of sites) (Exhibit III.6). One respondent explained that "Staff and administration are both aggressive in new ideas and innovation for new things in the program" and another observed that "Fiscal resources and extra opportunities in staff training have enabled us to fully utilize our newly networked computers." Respondents also noted that the hiring of additional staff, the provision of training, and the use of technology facilitated their program improvement activities.

Pilot site staff also were asked to identify the factors that impeded the implementation of change in their programs. The two most common responses were time constraints of staff (59 percent) and the lack of funding (41 percent) (see Exhibit III.7). As one site explained, "No additional teacher hours were available to conduct extra math and English classes. No classroom space is available at our new location." Other impediments included the need for additional training and the tendency of some staff to resist change.

In order to understand further barriers to change, Pilot sites were asked to identify the factors that prevented the implementation of steps that were planned but not carried out, and the factors that would have enabled their implementation. Survey respondents cited constraints related to time (29 percent), funding (18 percent), and a lack of support from outside agencies (12 percent). Also, in 24 percent of programs, steps were not implemented simply because they were not a priority. One program explained, "So many personnel and programmatic changes occurred this year that follow through on these issues wasn't the priority."

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Exhibit III.5
Changes in Program Operations Made by Pilot Sites 1 and 2 as a Result of Log Activities Reported for 1996-97

Areas of Program Operation	Number and Percent of Pilot Sites Reporting Implementing Changes to Areas of Program Operations *	
	Frequency (n = 17 sites)	Percent
Program Management	10	58.8
Information management system	8	47.1
Revised learner or staff handbook	3	17.6
New staff hired	1	5.9
Implemented changes to attendance policies	1	5.9
New funding secured	1	5.9
Enlisted support from community agencies	1	5.9
Developing program improvement plan	1	5.9
Assessment	8	47.1
Assessment instruments	6	35.3
Assessment procedures	5	29.4
Staff Development	8	47.1
Curriculum and Instruction	6	35.3
Upgraded instructional technology	4	23.5
Implemented changes to curriculum	4	23.5
Implemented changes to class schedule	4	23.5
Tutor Issues	4	23.5
Recruited and/or retained more tutors	2	11.8
Tutor reporting system	2	11.8
Provided training and assistance for tutors	2	11.8
Learner Retention	3	17.6
Learner Motivation	2	11.8
Learner Recruitment	2	11.8

Data source: Survey of Pilot Sites, Spring 1998

* All sites reported implementing at least one step; many sites reported more than one.

Exhibit III.6
Factors Facilitating Pilot 1 and Pilot 2 Sites' Implementation of Action Steps

Factors Facilitating Implementation of Action Steps	Number and Percent of Pilot Sites Reporting Factors Facilitating Implementation of Action Steps *	
	Frequency (n = 17 sites)	Percent
High quality staff	15	88.2
Additional fiscal resources	13	76.5
Good administrative direction	6	35.3
Hired new staff	3	17.6
Provided training	3	17.6
Current technology	2	11.8
Support from community	1	5.9
Cooperative learners	1	5.9
Cooperative volunteers	1	5.9
Staff's organization of materials	1	5.9
Revised orientation	1	5.9
Implemented new testing instruments	1	5.9
Created attendance requirement	1	5.9
Program Improvement Team focusing on specific needs	1	5.9
Instructors given time to get used to new materials/procedures	1	5.9
Increased cost of GED retakes	1	5.9
Sent information about program to support services	1	5.9

Data source: Survey of Pilot Sites, Spring 1998

* All sites reported at least one factor; many sites reported more than one.

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Exhibit III.7
Factors Impeding Pilot 1 and Pilot 2 Sites' Implementation of Action Steps

Factors Impeding Implementation of Action Steps	Number and Percent of Pilot Sites Reporting Factors Impeding Implementation of Action Steps *	
	Frequency (n = 17 sites)	Percent
Time constraints of staff	10	58.8
Funding constraints	7	41.2
Need for additional training	3	17.6
Staff resistance to change	2	11.8
Confusion over standard practices	1	5.9
Uncooperative prison staff	1	5.9
Learner enrollment dropped	1	5.9
More paperwork involved	1	5.9
Need for outside consultant	1	5.9
Poor quality staff	1	5.9
Difficulty obtaining administrative approval	1	5.9
PDE made changes in assessment tools/procedures	1	5.9
None	2	11.8

Data source: Survey of Pilot Sites, Spring 1998

* All but two sites reported impeding factors; many sites gave more than one response.

The factors that would have enabled Pilot sites to carry out the steps were additional time (29 percent), additional funds (24 percent), and greater administrative support (18 percent). One program indicated, for example, that they needed "consistency and long term stability of programmatic direction."

Pilot sites also made changes to their programs that were not as a result of the log process. All but two pilot sites reported making these adjustments in program management and curriculum and instruction (see Exhibit III.8). Within program management, these activities were revising information management systems and program planning procedures. For curriculum and instruction, the most frequent modifications were in the overall curriculum (29 percent) and class schedule (29 percent), and the use of instructional technology (18 percent). Staff from one site, for example, observed that "Teachers began to collaboratively plan lessons across the curriculum areas in response to working on a mutual theme of career planning." In addition, approximately a quarter (24 percent) of the Pilot sites made changes in their staff development activities, and 12 percent revised their assessment processes. At one site, they "Changed the GED schedule to 20 hours per week with open entry and exit to retain learners longer and gain goals more quickly."

Another item on the survey asked the Pilot sites to indicate whether their EQuAL teams still hold meetings, and if so, how often. About half of the sites (53 percent) continue to meet monthly and approximately one quarter of them (24 percent) noted that they meet "once or twice per month." Two sites indicated that they meet biweekly and one site indicated that they meet weekly. Only one of the pilot sites indicated that their EQuAL team no longer meets. In spite of the lack of meetings, their site has undertaken several program improvement activities, including offering new training, maintaining positive staff relations, and searching for better curricular materials.

Of the 16 Pilot sites that still hold EQuAL team meetings, only two have not added new staff members to the teams. At the sites at which teams still meet, new team members were usually instructors (59 percent) and administrators (53 percent). Other new team members included specialists (18 percent), volunteers (12 percent), support staff (12 percent), and a consultant (6 percent).

Wave 1 Program Improvement Activities

As a third type of data collection about the near-term outcomes from Project EQuAL, Abt Associates' research staff conducted a survey of the 64 Wave 1 sites during May 1998. Fifty-two (81 percent) of the sites completed surveys. For the Wave 1 programs, learner retention was the most frequently discussed issue during 1997-98 (their first year in Project EQuAL). Sixty-four percent of Wave 1 program improvement teams focused on this topic, as shown in Exhibit III.9

Exhibit III.8
Changes Made by Pilot 1 and Pilot 2 Sites in Addition to Action Steps Made Through the Log Process

Changes Made in Addition to Action Steps	Number and Percent of Pilot Sites Reporting Implementing Changes in Addition to Those Made Through the Log Process *	
	Frequency (n = 17 sites)	Percent
Program Management	10	58.8
Information management system	3	17.6
Revised program planning procedures	2	11.8
Improved communication between staff members	2	11.8
New staff hired	2	11.8
Addressed use of IEPs	2	11.8
Stronger relations with PDE	1	5.9
Updated mission statement	1	5.9
Revised program directory	1	5.9
Curriculum and Instruction	6	35.3
Implemented changes to curriculum	5	29.4
Implemented changes to class schedule	5	29.4
Upgraded instructional technology	3	17.6
Use of new instructional resources	1	5.9
Staff Development	4	23.5
Assessment	2	11.8
Assessment instruments	1	5.9
Assessment procedures	1	5.9
Learner Recruitment	2	11.8
Tutor Issues	1	5.9
Learner Retention	1	5.9
Welfare Reform Issues	1	5.9

Data source: Survey of Pilot Sites, Spring 1998

* All but two sites reported implementing measures in addition to the action steps implemented through the log process. Some sites reported more than one type of action.

Exhibit III.9
Areas of Program Operation Addressed by Wave 1 Sites During Their First Year of Participation in Project EQuAL

Areas of Program Operation	Pilot 1, Year 1 (1994-95) (n = 10 sites)		Pilot 2, Year 1 (1995-96) (n = 10 sites)		Wave 1, Year 1 (1997-98) (n = 52 sites)	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Curriculum and Instruction	7	70.0	5	50.0	25	48.1
Curriculum and instructional materials	2	20.0	1	10.0	12	23.1
Classroom instructional strategies	4	40.0	1	10.0	10	19.2
Instructional technology					6	11.5
Adapting to learning styles	1	10.0	2	20.0	5	9.6
Development or refinement of IEP/ILP			1	10.0	2	3.8
Class size					1	1.9
Retention of learners	6	60.0	6	60.0	33	63.5
Assessment	4	40.0	4	40.0	23	44.2
Interaction with Learners	4	40.0	3	30.0	15	28.8
Communication with learners			1	10.0	8	15.4
Learner achievement	3	30.0	1	10.0	7	13.5
Learner motivation					2	3.8
Learner goal-setting	1	10.0	1	10.0	1	1.9

Exhibit III.9 *(Continued)*
Areas of Program Operation Addressed by Wave 1 Sites During Their First Year of Participation in Project EQuAL

Areas of Program Operation	Pilot 1, Year 1 (1994-95) (n = 10 sites)		Pilot 2, Year 1 (1995-96) (n = 10 sites)		Wave 1, Year 1 (1997-98) (n = 52 sites)	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Staff Development	3	30.0	1	10.0	13	25.0
Recruitment of learners	2	20.0	3	30.0	20	38.5
Program Management	2	20.0	3	30.0	16	30.8
Information collection and management	2	20.0	3	30.0	6	11.5
Program planning and evaluation					3	5.8
Communication among staff					3	5.8
Roles of staff					1	1.9
Site location and safety					1	1.9
Program entrance requirements					2	3.8
Job satisfaction					1	1.9
Tutor Issues	1	10.0	4	40.0	7	13.5
Recruitment and retention of tutors			3	30.0	5	9.6
Tutor reporting	1	10.0	1	10.0	1	1.9
Training and assistance for tutors					1	1.9
Other: All components of the Self Assessment Questionnaire					4	7.7
Specific topics not identified					1	1.9

Data sources: Telephone Survey of Pilot 1 Programs, Spring-Summer 1995; Telephone Survey of Pilot 2 Programs, Spring-Summer 1996; and Written Survey of Wave 1 Programs, Spring-Summer 1998.

Learner retention was followed by curriculum and instruction as an area where changed was needed. Almost half of the Wave 1 programs specified topics such as the selection and development of curriculum/instructional materials, the use of classroom instructional strategies, the use of instructional technology, and the consideration of different learning styles. Other topics included assessment (44 percent), learner recruitment (39 percent), and program management (31 percent). For this third topic, respondents indicated that they were concerned primarily with information collection and data management, as well as with issues such as program evaluation, communication among staff, and program entrance and attendance requirements. Twenty-nine percent of the survey respondents noted concern about the ways in which programs interact with learners, including communications with and feedback from learners on topics such as learner achievement and learner goal-setting.

Exhibit III.9 also presents a comparison of the topics discussed by the Pilot sites during their first year in Project EQuAL with those selected by Wave 1 sites during their first year (1997-1998). While the main areas of concern were the same (curriculum and instruction, learner retention, and assessment), their order of importance differed among the three cohorts of EQuAL sites. While curriculum and instruction was the area most frequently discussed by Pilot 1 sites, learner retention was of most concern for the Pilot 2 and Wave 1 sites. Assessment was the third most important issue across all three cohorts (about 40 percent of respondents).

When Wave 1 programs were asked to identify steps they had taken toward program improvement during 1997-98, 39 percent reported that they had made changes in the way learners are assessed (see Exhibit III.10). This most likely reflects the emphasis ABLE has put on program accountability and the availability of training in assessment. Other areas in which Wave 1 programs adjusted their operations were in curriculum and instruction (29 percent), program management (25 percent), interaction with learners (23 percent), and learner retention (21 percent). In each of these areas, a greater percentage of the survey respondents indicated that they had implemented activities than had specified the topic as one for discussion in the EQuAL team meetings.

Each of the Wave 1 programs responding to the survey indicated that they would continue with the program improvement process, and named at least one topic or activity that they would be their focus. Presented in Exhibit III.11 is a list of the topics they indicated they would address.

Once again, curriculum and instruction as well as assessment were listed by over one third of the respondents. They were least likely to plan to focus on learner recruitment and tutor issues, which were named by just 14 and 9 percent of the respondents, respectively.

When asked about the benefits from participating in Project EQuAL, almost all (96 percent) of the Wave 1 survey respondents listed a personal, staff, or program benefit. Only four percent did not list any benefits. Exhibit III.12 shows the types of benefits reported by Wave 1 programs during their first year.

Exhibit III.10
Areas of Program Operations Addressed by Wave 1 Sites

Areas of Program Operation	Number and Percent of Topics Discussed by Wave 1 Sites *		Number and Percent of Topics Implemented by Wave 1 Sites		Number and Percent of Wave 1 Sites Reporting Implementing Activities, by Topic **	
	Frequency (n = 173 topics)	Percent	Frequency (n = 108 topics)	Percent	Frequency (n= 52 sites)	Percent
Curriculum and Instruction	36	20.8	16	14.8	15	28.8
Curriculum and instructional materials	12	6.9	8	7.4	8	15.4
Classroom instructional strategies	10	5.8	4	3.7	4	7.7
Instructional technology	6	3.5	1	0.9	1	1.9
Adapting to learning styles	5	2.9	1	0.9	1	1.9
Development or refinement of IEP/ILP	2	1.2	1	0.9	1	1.9
Class size and schedule	1	0.6	1	0.9	1	1.9
Retention of learners	33	19.1	11	10.2	11	21.2
Assessment	23	13.3	20	18.5	20	38.5
Recruitment of learners	20	11.6	11	10.2	11	21.2
Program Management	18	10.4	13	12.0	13	25.0
Information collection and management reporting	7	4.0	10	9.3	10	19.2
Program planning and evaluation	3	1.7	0		0	
Communication among staff	3	1.7	0		0	
Roles of staff	1	0.6	0		0	
Site location and safety	1	0.6	0		0	
Program entrance & attendance requirements	2	1.2	3	2.8	3	5.8
Job satisfaction	1	0.6	0		0	
Interaction with Learners	18	10.4	13	12.0	12	23.1
Communication with learners in general	8	4.6	8	7.4	8	15.4
Learner achievement	7	4.0	0		0	
Learner motivation	2	1.2	0		0	
Learner goal-setting	1	0.6	2	1.9	2	3.8
Connecting learners with community resources	1	0.6	3	2.8	3	5.8
Staff Development	13	7.5	7	6.5	7	13.5
Tutor Issues	7	4.0	8	7.4	6	11.5
Recruitment and retention of tutors	5	2.9	2	1.9	2	3.8
Tutor reporting	1	0.6	3	2.8	3	5.8
Training and assistance for tutors	1	0.6	3	2.8	3	5.8
Other specifics not given	5	2.9	9	8.3	9	17.3

Data source: Survey of Wave 1 programs, Summer 1998

* All sites reported at least one topic discussed; many sites reported more than one.

** All sites but one reported at least one topic implemented; many sites reported more than one.

Exhibit III.11
Areas of Program Operations that Wave 1 Sites Plan to Discuss in the Future

Areas of Program Operation	Number and Percent of Topics Reported by Wave 1 Sites		Number and Percent of Wave 1 Sites Planning to Discuss Each Topic*	
	Frequency (n = 117 topics)	Percent	Frequency (n = 52 sites)	Percent
Curriculum and Instruction	27	23.1	19	36.5
Curriculum and instructional materials	12	10.3	12	23.1
Classroom instructional strategies	8	6.8	8	15.4
Instructional technology	2	1.7	2	3.8
Understanding & adapting to learning styles	1	0.9	1	1.9
Development or refinement of IEP/ILP	4	3.4	4	7.7
Assessment	18	15.4	18	34.6
Other: Not Specified	14	12.0	13	25.0
Team will meet to develop new plans	9	7.7	9	17.3
Team will monitor progress of on-going efforts	5	4.3	5	9.6
Interaction with Learners	15	12.8	14	26.9
Communication with learners	4	3.4	4	7.7
Learner achievement	5	4.3	5	9.6
Learner motivation	2	1.7	2	3.8
Learner goal-setting	4	3.4	4	7.7
Retention	12	10.3	12	23.1
Staff Development	11	9.4	11	21.2
Program Management	11	9.4	11	21.2
Information collection and management, reporting	5	4.3	5	9.6
Program entrance requirements	2	1.7	2	3.8
Recognition of achievement of learners, staff	2	1.7	2	3.8
Advisory board	1	0.9	1	1.9
Hiring new staff	1	0.9	1	1.9
Recruitment	7	6.0	7	13.5
Tutor Issues	6	5.1	5	9.6
Recruitment and retention of tutors	3	2.6	3	5.8
Tutor reporting	2	1.7	2	3.8
Training and assistance for tutors	1	0.9	1	1.9

Data source: Survey of Wave 1 programs, Summer 1998

* All but six of the 52 responding sites specified at least one topic that the program improvement team planned to address next, and some identified more than one topic. The other six sites said that they planned to continue the program improvement process, but didn't specify the topics they would address.

Exhibit III.12
Reported Benefits to Wave 1 Sites from Participation in Project EQuAL

Types of Benefits	Number and Percent of Wave 1 Sites Reporting Benefits *	
	Frequency (n = 52 sites)	Percent
Benefits that are to the program improvement team	49	94.2
Team members have benefitted from increased communication within program and understanding the program as a whole	33	63.5
Team members feel more involved / appreciated	7	13.5
Team members have benefitted from the implementation of the plans and improvement of the program in general	5	9.6
Team members have benefitted from EQuAL training	4	7.7
Team members benefitted no specifics given	3	5.8
Benefits that are primarily to the program	35	67.3
More contact and communication among staff that led to everyone having a better understanding of the whole program	21	40.4
Program has become better organized and structured for continual improvement	9	17.3
Observed positive benefits to the program in general because of PIT plan implementation	4	7.7
New methods employed instruction and assessment that improved the program	1	1.9
Benefits that are primarily personal	18	34.6
I have better job performance and/or satisfaction because of this process	8	15.4
More contact and communication with colleagues from other programs / idea sharing among programs	5	9.6
I have optimism / confidence now that the program can be improved through this process	3	5.8
More contact with and better understanding of learners	2	3.8
Personal benefits no specifics given	2	3.8
No reported benefits	2	3.8

Data source: Survey of Wave 1 programs, Summer 1998.
* All of the 52 responding sites reported at least one type of benefit; many sites reported more than one type of benefit.

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In terms of personal, staff, and program benefits, improved communications was named as a major outcome from participation in Project EQuAL. Several respondents discussed the value of having staff work with one another in a structured process to collectively solve problems. For example, one respondent said, "What the EQuAL project has done is structure the process so that team members can develop and implement plans collectively and that decisions are based on real data." Through their work in EQuAL program improvement teams, staff have examined and discussed various aspects of the operation of their programs. This has helped individuals move from focusing on one aspect of the program to understanding the overall operation of the service. This has particularly assisted instructors, who often are not part of these discussions and decisions, to become more involved in program improvement

Another reported benefit is that programs are interacting more with each other—through the EQuAL listserv or at EQuAL workshops—and are discovering solutions to common problems without "reinventing the wheel." Several Wave 1 respondents also noted that their programs are stronger because of the changes they implemented as a result of undertaking the Data for Decision-Making Log process.

A major goal of Project EQuAL is to assist basic education and literacy programs begin the program improvement process. Of the Wave 1 respondents, 92 percent thought that their experience with Project EQuAL had helped them develop a vision for program improvement. The other eight percent stated that they already had a vision in place for program improvement.

Members of the EQuAL Statewide Implementation Team, which provides technical assistance to Wave 1 sites, also were asked to describe any changes they witnessed in programs. All of the Team members felt that Project EQuAL had changed participating programs in the following three ways: (1) increasing teamwork and communication within programs and between programs; (2) creating a process in each program to analyze their needs and activities and make improvements based on data, not assumptions; and (3) increasing the emphasis on program improvement in general. The views expressed by the Wave 1 respondents about the effects of Project EQuAL along with the perceptions of the Implementation Team members indicate that EQuAL has been effective in prompting program staff to address operational issues in a systematic way and to develop some new ways of working together in order to offer quality services to adults.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education initiated Project EQuAL to accomplish three objectives: 1) set performance standards, 2) institute a system of continuous program improvement, and 3) develop a coordinated infrastructure of policy, program development, training, and technical assistance. After four years of the implementation of EQuAL, a number of changes in practice, policy, training, and technical assistance have been undertaken in Pennsylvania's adult education system. Discussed in this section are the lessons that we have learned about the implementation of Project EQuAL. Also presented are recommendations for ABLE to consider as the remaining programs in the basic education and literacy system are trained to implement EQuAL, as existing EQuAL programs expand their activities in program improvement, and as the context for adult education evolves with the Workforce Investment Act of 1998.

Program Performance Standards

The process of setting program performance standards in administrative reporting, enrollment, and learner achievement in adult education served a number of purposes. First, it provided ABLE with the opportunity to evaluate the types of assessment instruments that programs were using and the quality of assessment data that they were collecting. Furthermore, it raised awareness among programs about the important role of assessment, the need for a management information system that can be accessed at the program level, and the ways in which these data can be used in program management and learner feedback. Through the standards setting process, issues concerning staff capacity to conduct learner assessment also were identified that resulted in the development of products for assisting staff in using assessment instruments.

Issues to Consider. ABLE accomplished its objective of setting standards, with draft standards being issued in February 1997 and the final standards in September 1998 (with ABLE's specification that the standards are likely to undergo further revision as they are applied.) As ABLE moves forward in implementing the standards, a number of issues will need to be addressed. . These issues, listed below, concern both the implementation of the existing standards, and the state and local programs' capacities to meet the requirements under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act:

- The extent to which the expected level of performance for learners should vary according to subpopulation group (e.g., first-level learners, intermediate-level learners). Recent research suggests that first-level learners may not make as much progress as intermediate and pre-GED learners given the same amount of instructional intervention. If these

subpopulations of learners do vary in the amount of progress they should be expected to make, then the performance standards will need to take these differences into account;

- The types of assessment instruments that programs can use for measuring and reporting learner progress (e.g., use of reading instruments for first-level learners). Recent research also indicates that general literacy measures such as the TABE and CASAS may not document well the progress of first-level learners participating in reading instruction. An alternative is to use reading tests for adults that assess the specific reading skills that are taught to first level learners. The performance of first-level learners will need to be examined to determine if reading tests are more appropriate measures for documenting the progress of first-level learners;

- In addition to reporting on adults' gains in basic skill and receipt of a high school diploma or its equivalent, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act requires that states provide data on adults' placement in, retention, or completion of postsecondary education, training, unsubsidized employment, or career advancement. The extent to which local programs are engaged in activities that lead to these outcomes as well as their capacity to document these outcomes needs to be examined; and

- The flexibility of the management information system for producing information that programs can use in managing instruction. Local program staff will need data about the demographic characteristics of learners, their attendance, and their assessment scores that can be analyzed at the program and class levels for optimal use in learner and program management. The management information system needs to be examined to determine its capacity to produce the types of data and analytical reports that are useful to program staff.

Recommendations. In light of these issues and those related to the overall implementation of performance standards, the following activities should be considered to strengthen the validity of the standards, the use of assessment data, and the capacity of local programs to meet the reporting requirements under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act:

- Conduct a validation study of the learner outcome standards through the analysis of assessment data from a sample of learners, using the Literacy Pro system to determine the level of gain across subpopulations of learners from a variety of service providers. This study will provide information that can be used to determine appropriate standards for each subpopulation of learners for whom data are reported;

- Continue to provide training in the administration of assessment instruments to incumbent and new staff. It is critical that reliable and valid data be collected by local programs, and the percentage of pre-post valid scores is the key indicator that there are quality data. Staff need to be reinforced in the appropriate use of instruments and in strategies for ensuring the collection of pre-post data for each learner;

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- Conduct a survey of programs to determine the extent to which programs are referring learners to further education or training and/or unsubsidized jobs and the processes they have for documenting these outcomes. This survey would provide baseline information for determining the range of service providers who are engaged in these types of activities as well as their capacity for collecting the required outcome data; and

- Conduct further training on the use of the management information system for accessing data for managing programs, particularly in the area of instruction. Staff need assistance in interpreting the data that can be retrieved using Literacy Pro, and on how to use these data at the class level for organizing instruction and for providing feedback and direction to learners.

Continuous Program Improvement

EQuAL's Impact. Through Project EQuAL, program staff learned new strategies for working as a team, for analyzing the operation of their programs through a problem-solving problem process, and for identifying and implementing solutions to program problems. Three key factors have influenced staffs' capacity to undertake these activities: 1) quality of staff, 2) time to carry out activities, and 3) administrative support.

In reporting on their success in implementing program improvements, staff from the Pilot 1 and 2 sites noted that having high quality staff facilitated their capacity to analyze program problems, identify possible solutions, and make changes in the operations of their programs. Also having the time to undertake the problem-solving process and to implement the changes that they identified through this process was critical. Where program staff were not able to meet as a team or examine their programs, the lack of time was cited as a primary impediment. While the quality of staff and availability of time are important resources in the program improvement process, the support from the program's administrator also is crucial. Without this support, staff are hampered in their ability to make the changes that they identify in their team meetings.

The EQuAL sites had differing degrees of success in using the problem-solving process. For many staff, the process of specifying a focused question that could be answered was difficult. Often multiple questions were stated as one, or the question that was stated was too broad. Another challenge was gathering and analyzing data that related to the questions that had been posed. Sometimes appropriate data were not available, or data that did exist were not easily accessible. In spite of these difficulties, staff worked hard to understand the issues in their programs that were impeding success and to identify feasible actions that they could take to solve program problems.

The use of the problem-solving process as the major intervention for Project EQuAL revealed a range of issues that staff think need to be addressed in their programs. Across all EQuAL sites,

learner recruitment, curriculum and instruction, assessment, and interaction with learners were named as areas for improvement. The Pilot sites also identified recruitment and retention of tutors and reporting of tutor data as important issues.

In assessing the extent to which the problem-solving process was institutionalized and had effects on program operations, the programs reported that all but one of the 17 operating Pilot 1 and 2 sites still meet as a team, with half of them meeting monthly and others more frequently. The Pilot sites also were asked whether they had implemented action steps based on the Data for Decision-Making Logs that they completed in their team meetings. Sixty-five percent of the sites had carried out all or the majority of the program changes they had identified. Interestingly, most of the changes they reported were in the area of program management, followed by assessment and staff development. While these areas are not the ones that programs had identified in completing their logs during their first year of EQuAL, perhaps they found that improvements in programs were needed in these areas to build a base for changes in other areas.

Recommendations. The experiences of the programs that have implemented EQuAL to date point to a number of activities that ABLE might consider in fostering continuous program improvement. These are:

- Refine the training in the problem-solving process to provide staff with skills in problem identification/question asking, data analysis and interpretation, and solution specification. Staff need assistance in determining how to specify a question about a program issue, methods for collecting new or examining existing information, and strategies for analyzing and interpreting data using basic data reduction techniques. Staff also need suggestions on how to develop feasible solutions to the problems that they have posed;
- Gather information about the types of changes that programs have made in the key areas of program improvement and disseminate lessons learned about the change process. Through EQuAL, program staff have worked on a number of similar issues and made program changes based on their review and analysis of program information. It would be helpful for program staff to learn about the range of changes that programs have made in the core areas of program operations that have been the focus of EQuAL's problem-solving process.

- Develop a strategy for assisting programs in improving curriculum and instruction--a key area programs identified as requiring change. As the federally funded research studies on ABE and ESL curriculum disseminate the results of their work, this information could be used to guide local programs in examining the quality of their instruction and curricular materials; and

- Consider strategies for fostering the participation of program administrators in the improvement process and for addressing the need for time, staff, and fiscal resources in changing program operations. Program administrators are critical to the implementation of continuous program improvement and need assistance in determining the ways in which they can provide their staff with time and resources to work together in examining the operation of their programs and in implementing changes.

Policy, Training, and Technical Assistance

Policy. Through Project EQuAL, ABLE has built an infrastructure of new policies to strengthen program operations and accountability as well as a refined training and technical assistance capacity to support program improvement. The major policy directives that ABLE developed as a result of EQuAL were the following:

- Revision of ABLE's program monitoring process;
- Specification of program performance standards;
- Alignment of National Literacy Act of 1991, Section 353 special projects funding;
- Revision of program funding guidelines; and
- Specification of requirements for development of program improvement plans and participation in assessment training.

These policy directives have prompted programs to address the issues of accountability and improvement, as well as provided staff with tools to assist them in these processes. As ABLE moves forward with Project EQuAL, new areas for policy will need to be considered. These are:

- Incentives and strategies for programs to institutionalize and expand the improvement activities begun under Project EQuAL, including the provision of time, staff, and fiscal resources for planning, developing, and implementing program changes. Options need to be considered, such as reducing the number of learners served, so that there are resources for paying staff to engage in program improvement that will enhance the likelihood of success of the learners who are being served;
- Refinements in the performance standards to reflect the needs of the various learner subpopulations and service provider systems. The performance standards need to be revised to reflect the new reporting requirements under the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act;
- Incentives and strategies for programs to change their curriculum and assessment processes, which are essential to the teaching and learning process and are among the most difficult program improvements to make. Strategies such as supporting the evaluation of innovative practices at the local level might be considered as one step in developing a base of information for program improvement;
- Strategies for providing extended learning through distance education and other methods to address the need for more time and intensity in instruction. One possibility is to designate

pilot projects that would experiment with a range of existing distance learning tools (e.g., Crossroads Cafe, ALMA, Internet-based instruction developed by the Cyber STEP project) to determine methods for serving new populations of learners or extending the amount of instruction received by existing learners; and

- Strategies for programs to expand or change the roles of staff to provide adequate capacity for collecting, analyzing, and using data for all aspects of program operations, and for fostering learner articulation with other education, job training, and support services in the community. One possibility is to train a core of staff regionally who could provide assistance to programs in the collection and analysis of data and who would receive periodic follow-up training to enhance the quality of their skills in these activities.

Training and Technical Assistance. Since the inception of Project EQuAL, the state's training and technical assistance system in adult education has been reorganized and redefined. While there are fewer professional development centers, the role of these entities has become more focused on program improvement and the facilitation of staff change. As this transformation has taken place, staff delivering training and technical assistance related to Project EQuAL have identified two critical areas in which they need further assistance. These are:

- Analyzing program issues, identifying appropriate data collection and analysis methods, and interpreting data results; and

- Providing feedback to staff in their activities in conducting program self-assessment and preparing Data for Decision-Making Logs.

These activities are at the heart of the change strategy developed under Project EQuAL, and staff need to be better equipped at providing peer assistance in carrying out these processes. Since these are difficult activities, it may take a variety of strategies to reinforce the skills that staff need to perform them. For example, the specialization of staff in providing assistance in areas such as data analysis and interpretation may enhance the quality of the assistance that currently is being provided to local program staff. The use of electronic communication in giving assistance also would facilitate the use of technical assistants who are not geographically proximic to the program staff with whom they are working.

In discussions with local program staff on program performance standards and continuous program improvement, a number of topics for training were identified. These topics will need to be reviewed and appropriate training and technical assistance developed. Given the content of some of the areas, such as curriculum and instruction, an effective strategy may be to have technical assistance staff specialize in different topic areas to ensure that quality assistance is provided. In guiding the development of materials for training, ABLE should draw upon the most recent research and evaluation studies that are being undertaken nationally.

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Workforce Investment Act Issues

The Workforce Investment Act of 1998 poses a number of challenges to adult education in the unified plans that have been developed for the delivery of job training and basic skills. Issues that require attention are the following:

- Strategies for promoting interagency collaboration whereby learners can access the variety of support services that they need to facilitate the accomplishment of their educational goals. Local program staff may need training in strategies for collaboration and how to negotiate agreements with other providers who can offer additional services to learners participating in adult education;

- Models for learner articulation so that learners are aware of and can access the further education and job training services that are available. To meet the requirements of the Workforce Investment Act, adult basic skills providers will need to participate in One-Stop systems to provide additional support to adult clients. Local adult education staff will need technical assistance concerning models for operating One-Stop services and strategies for how they can participate. The emerging national research on One-Stop systems would provide an information base from which technical assistance could be developed; and

- Strategies for promoting a coherent basic skills and job training system that builds upon and expands the resources in a community. At the state level, ABLE will need to continue its interagency activities in building relationships and developing policies that can facilitate the operation of an integrated service delivery system at the local level. At the local level, basic skills providers will need to be trained on how to develop a strategy for assisting in the development of an integrated service delivery system, which includes assistance in conducting an environmental scan of the services in their community, collaborating with service providers, and working with learners to motivate them to access the range of services that will be available.

A Final Note

As a process for policy and programmatic change, Project EQuAL has accomplished a great deal in a relatively short period of time based on historical patterns of organizational change. This process has indeed been developmental, with interventions and policies being designed as the process progressed. While the quantitative count of changes that programs have made is substantial, the transformation of program staff in operating in teams, in serving in leadership roles in developing training, and in providing peer assistance is the real measure of the near-term effects of Project EQuAL. An important lesson learned thus far is that it takes three critical elements to engage in systemic change: 1) strong leadership on the part of the state staff leading the initiative; 2) quality materials and training; and 3) a willing audience of service providers to reflect on their practices and experiment with new processes. These three ingredients have been at the core of the Project EQuAL initiative.

APPENDIX A

PROJECT EQUAL COHORTS

Appendix A
Project EQuAL Cohorts

Pilot 1 Programs (10)
Project EQuAL First Year: 1994-1995

Altoona Community Education Center
Central Intermediate Unit 10 County Vocational-Technical School
Community Women's Education Project
Greater Pittsburgh Literacy Council
Lancaster/Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13
Norristown Area Achor School District
Pennsylvania State University-Beaver Adult Literacy Action
Rockview
State Correctional Institution
Scranton Council for Literacy Advance (SCOLA)
Tri-County OIC

Pilot 2 Programs (10)
Project EQuAL First Year: 1995-1996

ARIN Intermediate Unit 28
Cumberland Valley School District
Greater Johnstown Career and Technology Center
Goodwill Industries of Pittsburgh
Lehigh Carbon Community College
Midstate Literacy Council
Northampton Community College
Northwest Tri-County Intermediate Unit 5
Partners for English as a Second Language
Tuscarora Intermediate Unit 11Adult Education and Job Training Center

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Core Sites (Seven sites from Pilot 1 and 2 Programs): 1996-1997

Community Women's Education Project
Goodwill Industries of Pittsburgh
Lancaster/Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13
Midstate Literacy Council
Northwest Tri-County Intermediate Unit 5
Tri-County OIC
Tuscarora Intermediate Unit 11 Adult Education and Job Training Center

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Wave 1 Programs (64)
Project EQuAL First Year: 1997-1998

Adult Literacy Center of the Lehigh Valley
Adult Literacy Lawrence County
Adult Literacty Program - Bayard Taylor
Adult Literacy Training Program (Nanticoke)
Allegheny Intermediate Unit
Allentown Area School District
Bedford County Literacy Council
Bradford-Wyoming County Literacy Program
Bucks County Correctional ABE Program
Bucks County Volunteers in Teaching Alternatives
Carbon County Area Vocational Technical School
Catholic Charities Immigration & Refugee
Center for Literacy (Philadelphia)
Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit
Chester County OIC
Community Action Southwest
Community College of Beaver County
Community Learning Center (Philadelphia)
Crawford Central School Distict
Delaware County Community College
District 1199C Training
Employment & Training Inc.
Erie Adult Learning Center
Fayette County Community Agency
Forbes Road East AVTS
Greater Erie Community Action Committee
Germantown Women's Educational Project
Gertrude A. Barber Center
Hispanic American Council
Indian Valley Opportunity Center
Indochinese Council
Intermediate Unit 1
Lackawanna Junior College
Lincoln Intermediate Unit 12
Literacy Council Reading-Berks
Literacy Council of Venango County
Literacy Program-Reading Area Community College
Lutheran Settlement House
Lycoming County Literacy Project
Mansfield University
Metro Career Center
Midwestern Intermediate Unit 4
Mifflin County Library Literacy Program
Montgomery County Intermediate Unit
Nazareth Area Adult Education Program
New World Association
Peirce Jr. College
Penn College Expansion Grant
Penncrest School District
Pennsylvania School for the Deaf
Pennsylvania State University-Beaver/Adult Literacy Action
Perry County Literacy Council
PIC of Westmoreland/Fayette
Puerto Rican Organizing Committee
School District of Philadelphia
Schuylkill Intermediate Unit 29
Somerset County AVTS
State College ASD
Temple University
Waynesboro School District
Williamsport Area School District
Won Kwang English as a Second Language
York County Area Vocational Technical School
YWCA Adult Literacy Center

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Signature: Eric Stickney

Printed Name/Position/Title: Eric Stickney / Senior Analyst

Organization/Address: Abt Associates / 4800 Montgomery Lane / Bethesda, MD

Telephone: 301-913-0661

FAX: 301-718-3108

E-Mail Address: eric_stickney@abtassoc.com

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